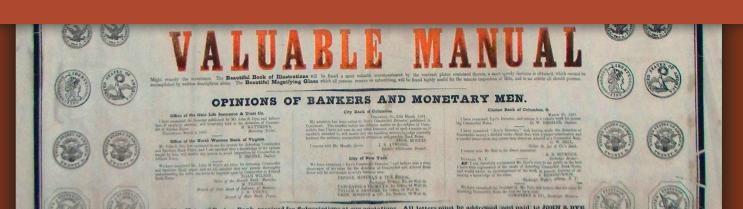


# JOHN S. DYE AND HIS COUNTERFEIT DETECTORS

By Patrick M. Parkinson



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First Printing, 2021
Book design provided by Lianna Spurrier under sponsorship of Newman Numismatic Portal.

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6 John S. Dye and His Counterfeit Detectors

#### PREFACE

For more than thirty years, I have collected printed and manuscript materials documenting the history of American banking. My collection had long included a few counterfeit detectors, which I had encountered most frequently in the auction catalogs of numismatic bookseller George F. Kolbe. Far more often than not, however, I was outbid by avid collectors who focused on counterfeit detectors. I first heard of John S. Dye in 2001, when the E-Sylum, a weekly Internet mailing list sponsored by the Numismatic Bibliomania Society, included a note by numismatist O. David Bowers on Dye's publications. Still, I had no special interest in Dye until January 2018, when the magnificent advertising broadside shown on the cover of this book was offered for sale by Kolbe & Fanning, Numismatic Booksellers. Nothing in my collection had the same visual appeal, so I was determined to have it, and this time outbid the collectors of counterfeit detectors.

I try to thoroughly research every item in my collection, and this book began as an effort to understand Dye's counterfeit detector publications and his exchange broker business, both of which were touted in the broadside. I began by constructing a chronology of Dye's life and his brokerage and publications businesses. Counterfeit detectors are quintessential ephemeral publications, so relatively few copies have survived. However, publishers of counterfeit detectors typically advertised them in newspapers, and a chronology can be constructed by searching for those ads in digital databases of historical newspapers (for example, GenealogyBank.com and Newspapers.com). While this method quickly provided much of the necessary information, for almost two years I was stymied by a large gap in the chronology. From 1860 to 1876, Dye's publications disappeared, and Dye himself nearly did so as well. I was not the first to conjecture that during this period be had assumed other names and undertaken various activities wholly unrelated to brokerage or financial publishing. Eventually I found compelling evidence that he had assumed those names and can document that before and during his disappearance there was much more to Dye than is conveyed by the broadside. While I have not filled in all the blanks, this is a thorough history of his publications and a rich, if not complete, account of his colorful life.

No book can reach completion without encouragement and support for the author. From beginning to end, I have received both encouragement and editorial support from my wife, Susan B. Strange, who shares my interest in history and even manages to convey interest in John S. Dye. Wayne Homren, the numismatist whose broad and deep knowledge is on display weekly as editor of the E-Sylum, promised early on to be my cheerleader, and he has delivered. Wayne also introduced me to Len Augsburger, who agreed to publication of my book by the Newman Numismatic Portal (NNP). At NNP, Lianna Spurrier has skillfully turned my manuscript and illustrations into a book in short order, along the way rendering irrelevant my twentieth century technical skills. Over the years, George F. Kolbe and David Fanning have patiently answered many questions about counterfeit detectors. George and Wayne Homren carefully read and provided comments on my first draft. Also, Nancy Davis, Curator Emeritus at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, read an early draft and made many useful observations, including calling to my attention the similarity between aspects of John S. Dye's behavior and that of P.T. Barnum. My wife has read and commented on more drafts than she perhaps cares to remember.

Last but not least, several librarians helped me gain access to extant copies of Dye's publications, some of which are the sole surviving copies. Worthy of special mention are Linda Showalter at Marietta College Legacy Library, Ann K. Sidelar at Western Reserve Historical Society, Ashley Cataldo at the American Antiquarian Society, and David Hill at the American Numismatic Society.

### INTRODUCTION

Counterfeiting of bank notes in the United States began with the opening of the first commercial banks in the 1780s and 1790s. Throughout the period before the Civil War, detecting counterfeits became increasingly difficult because the states were chartering thousands of banks, each of which often issued its own distinctive notes, and the notes often circulated far from the location of the issuing bank. The first guide to detecting counterfeit bank notes was published in 1806. In 1826, the first bank note reporter and counterfeit detector, a periodical devoted to identifying counterfeits and reporting the prices at which bank notes could be sold, began publication in New York City. By the 1850s, dozens of these periodicals were published, not only in New York City, but also in Philadelphia and Boston and as far west as Cincinnati and St. Louis. The need for such publications diminished in the mid-1860s, when the federal government began chartering banks and standardized the design of the notes that those national banks issued. In 1866, the federal government taxed out of existence notes issued by state-chartered banks. Soon thereafter the federal government took steps to ensure that national bank notes could be sold at face value. These measures eliminated the need for bank note reporters and greatly reduced, but did not eliminate, the need for counterfeit detectors.<sup>1</sup>

John S. Dye (circa 1821-1881) was only one of many publishers of counterfeit detectors, but he was one of very few who remained in business for many years. Dye first published a counterfeit detector in Cincinnati in 1850. Over the rest of his life, at various times and in various places, he published at least four other counterfeit detectors, a bank note reporter, and two books on related subjects. When he died in 1881, it was his wish that his wife and eldest son carry on publication of a counterfeit detector bearing his name. Publication continued until 1910, but a man Dye almost surely never met was largely responsible for its endurance.

Dye also was a noteworthy innovator in his field, being one of the first to recognize that the emergence of new types of counterfeit notes required new approaches to detecting them. His first counterfeit detector set out rules for detecting counterfeits rather than trying to catalog all the counterfeit notes in existence. While at least one other detector had already taken this approach a year earlier, the vast majority of competing detectors continued to take the quixotic approach of seeking to enumerate all counterfeits in circulation. By 1854, Dye had developed the insight that the only way to identify the emerging plague of "spurious" notes, that is, notes printed from bank note plates that had been altered to indicate they had been issued by a bank in a different location or with a different name, was to identify the genuine bank notes each bank

A superb guide to this literature is William H. Dillistin's Bank Note Reporters and Counterfeit Detectors, 1826-1866 (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1949).

had issued. He implemented this approach in 1855 through publication of a massive catalog of genuine notes. The work was a critical success, widely praised by bank note engraving companies and bankers. But it was a commercial failure; proceeds from its sale evidently were not sufficient to cover the enormous amount it cost Dye to produce it. Another firm took over its publication the next year, and soon other firms began publishing their own registers of genuine bank notes, so that Dye can fairly be said to have established a new genre of counterfeit detectors. When bank notes issued by state-chartered banks were taxed out of existence, he launched a government counterfeit detector that identified the more limited universe of counterfeits of U.S. currency and national bank notes, the detector that outlived him and the nineteenth century.

The primary purpose of this book is to document the history of Dye's counterfeit detectors, a task made difficult by the ephemeral nature of such publications. Because new counterfeits and new genuine bank notes were constantly being circulated, counterfeit detectors quickly became outdated and were discarded, leaving very few surviving copies.<sup>2</sup> This book also tells the story of Dye's life. There was much more to John S. Dye than his counterfeit detectors. As was often the case for publishers of counterfeit detectors, he was a dealer in bank notes and a banker. But that was far from all. Throughout his life he was involved in various radical political and social movements. In the 1860s and 1870s he authored works on very different and sometimes very strange subjects that he published under other names. He was a popular lecturer and a showman, some of whose performances in the 1870s invite comparisons to P. T. Barnum. Also, for a brief period he drew on his knowledge of counterfeiting to serve as an operative of the United States Secret Service.

Biographers have a tendency to write selective accounts that paint their subjects in a favorable light. This story includes not only Dye's successes but also his failures and recounts incidents that made him a controversial and sometimes notorious figure. The evidence underlying the story is carefully documented, and instances are noted where the available evidence is ambiguous or even contradictory.

The story of Dye's life remains a work in progress, awaiting the discovery of additional evidence. Among nineteenth century Americans, well-documented lives are very much the exception rather than the rule. While politicians and other "great men" carefully documented their lives so future biographers could give them what the great men thought they were due, the vast majority of men and women had neither the means nor the inclination to do so. Because Dye of necessity sought publicity for his counterfeit detectors and his other books and political causes, his life can be documented better than most, largely through newspaper reviews and ads. Still, despite several years of effort by the author, some gaps and puzzles remain. Perhaps publication of this book, by calling attention to Dye's life, will help fill in those gaps and solve those puzzles.

Like Dillistin, where copies of detectors have not survived, the author has filled in many gaps by drawing on ads for, and reviews of, Dye's detectors in contemporary newspapers.

## EARLY LIFE IN PENNSYLVANIA AND OHIO, CIRCA 1821-1850

Available evidence indicates that John S. Dye was born in 1821 or possibly early 1822 in Washington County, Pennsylvania, southwest of Pittsburgh and near Pennsylvania's border with Ohio. Enoch Dye, his paternal grandfather, was a veteran of the Revolutionary War who migrated about 1788 from the eastern part of Pennsylvania to what later became Washington County. Enoch and his wife Rebecca Leet had at least seven children, including Enoch II.<sup>3</sup> Enoch Dye II and his wife Mary Polly McIntire were the parents of John S. Dye.<sup>4</sup> John S. likely was the last of their nine children, as Enoch II died on May 24, 1821. While engaged in felling timber, a limb of a tree struck him in the head, fracturing his skull and causing his death. A local newspaper reported his accidental death and stated that Enoch II was a farmer in Canton Township, about 40 years old, and that he was survived by a wife and eight young children.<sup>5</sup> Given that Enoch II died in May 1821, John S. most likely was born later in 1821 but possibly in the first few months of 1822.

Although John S. Dye was the son of a farmer in rural Pennsylvania, as early as 1842 he demonstrated larger ambitions. That year he became a member of the Washington Literary Society of Washington College, located in the town of Washington, Pennsylvania.<sup>6</sup> There is no evidence Dye ever was enrolled at Washington College, which is now called Washington and Jefferson College. He is not listed in the alumni or the nongraduates registers. Washington College was very small at the time, and the society probably welcomed the participation of nonstudents who shared an interest in literature, extemporaneous speaking, and debate, which the society was formed to promote.<sup>7</sup>

While still living in Pennsylvania, John S. Dye evidently married a woman named Mary Jane and in 1844 fathered a son named Joseph M. Dye. Marriages and births in Pennsylvania were not systematically recorded until much later. As will be discussed below, the 1850 U.S.

<sup>3</sup> Boyd Crumrine, Editor. History of Washington County, Pennsylvania, with Biographical Sketches of Many of the Pioneers and Prominent Men (Philadelphia: L.M. Everts & Co., 1882), 687.

New York City Marriage Records, 1829-1940. Record of John S. Dye's second marriage (to Emma C. Haering) on July 10, 1870. The record states that Dye's father's name was Enoch Dye and his mother's maiden name was McIntire. Accessed using Ancestry.com.

<sup>5</sup> "Accidental Death," Washington Review and Examiner (Washington, PA), May 28, 1821.

Catalogue of the Washington Literary Society of Washington College, Washington, PA (Washington, PA.: Printed at the Commonwealth Office, 1851), 21.

Author's conversation with Kelly Helm, Archivist of Washington and Jefferson College, March 6, 2020.

census for Morgan County, Ohio recorded a John S. Dye, aged 28, born in Pennsylvania, living with a woman named Mary J., aged 26, also born in Pennsylvania. Living with them was a son named Joseph, who was 7 years old and born in Pennsylvania.8 While an age of 7 would imply birth in 1842 or 1843, later evidence indicates Joseph M. Dye was born in 1844.

Washington, Pennsylvania was located on the National Road, construction of which occurred between 1811 and 1837, when the Panic of 1837 halted its westward path in Illinois. Like many in nineteenth century America, John S. Dye evidently saw brighter prospects further west, and Dye probably took the National Road to Ohio, where he seems to have arrived no later than 1846. As already stated, he was recorded in the 1850 census as living in Morgan County, Ohio, and the younger of his two sons, named John S. like his father, was aged four and had been born in Ohio. The same census shows John's older brother, Enoch Dye III (1808-1881), a saddler, lived just down the road. Within Morgan County, both brothers and their families probably lived in McConnelsville, Ohio, where Enoch III served as mayor in 1846.9 For a time, John S. worked in Malta, Ohio, just across the Muskingum River from McConnelsville.

We know John S. worked in Malta because a history of Morgan County written about forty years later stated that in 1847 John S. Dye, "who had previously dealt in counterfeit detectors, published for a short time a half-size sheet called *The Workingman's Advocate*," a paper published in Malta. 10 That Dye had published *The Workingman's Advocate* is confirmed by the sole surviving issue of the paper, dated September 30, 1847.11 On page 4 of that four-page issue an ad appears from John S. Dye dated July 26, 1847, which stated: "The Books and Accounts of the Workingman's Advocate office, while under my control, are now in the hands of Mr. S.H. Davis, present proprietor, who is duly authorized to settle the same. Therefore, all persons knowing themselves indebted will call and settle their account with as little delay as possible." As to how long Dye was the publisher, it was a weekly publication published on Thursdays. The surviving copy is issue number 55, which would imply it was first published in September 1846. Even if Dye published the newspaper from the start, he did so for less than a year, consistent with the statement in the later county history.

The contents of the paper provide the first of what would become a lifetime of evidence that there was another quite different side to John S. Dye than the broker, banker, and financial publisher. The Workingman's Advocate was a radical political newspaper, devoted to espousing the ideas of the American social radical George Henry Evans (1805-1856). Its title is identical to the title of the newspaper Evans published in New York City from 1829 to 1836, which was launched as the magazine of the New York Workingmen's Party, a party devoted to advancing the interests of laboring men. With the onset of the Panic of 1837, the New York party and other eastern workingmen's parties splintered into factions and collapsed, and the first The Workingman's Advocate ceased publication. Evans was left to ponder the reasons for the movement's failure and what measures might be taken to better serve the interests of labor. By 1841, he had concluded that the key was land reform. He argued that public lands in the West should be free, and, if

Below it will be revealed that a legal action against Dye and his wife in 1857 indicated that his wife's middle name was Jane. Some genealogical sources claim her maiden name was Mount but provide no evidence.

Charles Robertson. History of Morgan County, Ohio, with Portraits and Biographical Sketches of Leading Men (Chicago: L.H. Watkins & Co, 1886), 304.

<sup>10</sup> 

The Workingman's Advocate (Malta, OH), September 30, 1847, 4. A microfilm copy of the paper is held by 11 Marietta College Library, Marietta, OH.

they were free, the option of going west to farm would allow workers in the East to earn higher wages and secure better working conditions. 12 The platform of the Workingman's Party in Malta appeared on the first page of the surviving 1847 issue of Malta's The Workingman's Advocate. The platform lead off with the issue of land reform and was fully consistent with the views Evans espoused from 1841 onward. It identified the "issues for 1847" as "land limitation, inalienable homestead, and freedom of the public lands." Among other measures it supported were an amendment to the Ohio Constitution to provide for direct election by the people of all state and county officers, "a reduction in salaries [of officers] to the amount paid for useful and productive labor," and "a new law taxing every man according to his wealth."

It is less clear what to make of the statement in the county history published in 1886 that Dye "dealt in counterfeit detectors" prior to 1847. There is no evidence he edited or published a counterfeit detector before 1850.13 Neither copies of an earlier detector nor newspaper advertisements for its sale have been located.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, when Dye published a variety of counterfeit detectors in subsequent years, he often stated that the detectors were established in 1850. It may mean that prior to 1847 he was employed by one of the many publishers of counterfeit detectors then in circulation, from whom he could have acquired the skills necessary to later publish his own. One possibility is Thomas W. Lord, who published the Zanesville Counterfeit Detector from 1842 to 1848 before moving to Cincinnati. Zanesville is located just twenty-five miles up the Muskingum River from McConnelsville. As will be discussed below, both Dye and Thomas W. Lord seem to have been associated with the same private bank in Cincinnati in 1850, and the two later became bitter enemies. But there is no direct evidence Dye was associated with Lord's Zanesville detector.

Edward Pessen. Most Uncommon Jacksonians. The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement (Albany: State 12 University of New York Press, 1967), 70-72.

In 1860 a publication stated that Dye's Wall Street Broker, a counterfeit detector Dye later published in New York City, had begun publication in 1847. See J.B. French, Gazetteer of the State of New York (Syracuse, NY: R. Pearsall Smith, 1860), 443-444. However, as documented below, Dye first published that detector in 1857.

The data bases of digitized newspapers created by GenealogyBank.com, Newspapers.com, and the Library of Congress were searched in April 2020 without success.

<sup>15</sup> Dillistin, Bank Note Reporters, 121.

# EXCHANGE BROKER AND PUBLISHER IN CINCINNATI, 1850-1854

#### DYE'S RAPID RISE, 1850-1853

As already mentioned, the 1850 U.S. census for Morgan County, Ohio showed John S. Dye living there with his wife and two children and that his occupation was that of a broker. Other evidence shows, however, that by 1850 he was spending time in Cincinnati and also in New York City. As will be discussed, that year he published a counterfeit detector in Cincinnati. Dye also was recorded in the 1850 U.S. census as a broker living in New York City. 16 He does not seem to have opened his own brokerage firm in Cincinnati until 1851, so he must have been an employee of another brokerage firm in 1850.17 He may have been in New York City in 1850 to establish a bank account in that city, which he would have needed to operate his own brokerage firm.<sup>18</sup>

His listing in the Cincinnati directory for 1851 makes clear his business was that of an exchange broker. An exchange broker dealt in exchange, that is, it bought and sold financial instruments payable in other cities, especially other financial and commercial centers. In order to offer these services, an exchange broker needed to establish deposit accounts with banks or private bankers in those cities, through which the exchange broker could make and receive payments on its own account and on behalf of clients.<sup>19</sup> In the two decades after the demise of

Dye need not have been in two different places at the same time to be recorded in both places, because 16 he was recorded in Morgan County on July 26 and in New York City on August 10. Moreover, his wife might have reported him as the head of household in Morgan County, even if he was in New York City on July 26. Accessed using Ancestry.com.

From 1849 through the late 1870s, C.S. Williams published an annual Cincinnati business directory entitled Williams' Cincinnati Directory and Business Advertiser. John S. Dye first appears in this directory in the volume for 1851-52 (published in 1851). He is listed on page 293 as an exchange broker at 45 W. 3rd Street, (the southeast corner of Walnut and Third Streets). Dye does not appear in lists of Cincinnati banks, bankers and exchange dealers published in Cincinnati and republished in The Bankers' Magazine and Statistical Register, then the leading national banking periodical. See Vol. 5, No. 2 (August 1850), 169-170 and No. 11 (May 1851), 881-882. But the latter list, which came from the Cincinnati Gazette, noted that in addition there was "a host of brokers...." Dye may well have been considered a broker by the Gazette.

Perhaps Dye had more than one reason for being in New York City. The census record for New York City shows him living with a Julia Dye, aged 23. Perhaps Julia was a cousin or niece, the daughter of one of Dye's many uncles and brothers. Then again, perhaps her name was not really Dye.

Private bankers were individuals or partnerships who provided banking services without the benefit of a charter from the state in which they were located. Without a charter, state laws prohibited private bankers from

the Second Bank of the United States in 1836 and the Panic of 1837, exchange brokers and private bankers played a central role in the nation's payments system:

The brokers and private bankers, who were not then clearly distinguished from each other, were, it seems, carrying on a much more active commercial business than the chartered banks. Through their hands flowed the exchanges of the country, both foreign and domestic; most of the out-of-town drafts were obtained through them; the largest portion of collections on drafts, notes, and out-of-town bills receivable were made by them; they sent home for redemption 'the vast quantity of currency,' that is bank notes, and they dealt in gold and specie.<sup>20</sup>

In Dye's case, the brokerage services he offered in 1850 probably were similar to the services he offered in April 1852, when an ad for those services appeared in one of Dye's counterfeit detectors.<sup>21</sup> The ad stated that Dye bought and sold exchange on New York, Philadelphia, and New Orleans, made collections of amounts received in those locations, and promptly remitted the proceeds at current rates of exchange. He also bought and sold land warrants. <sup>22</sup> The ad made clear that his office did not take deposits, perhaps to reassure clients that his office was not vulnerable to runs (sudden and widespread demands by depositors to withdraw their deposits) in the way that deposit-taking private bankers and chartered note-issuing banks were. Because Dye did not at that time accept deposits, he called himself a broker rather than a private banker, although, as noted above, at the time the distinction between an exchange broker and a private banker was not clear cut. In fact, the ad goes on to make reference to brokers and banks "keeping their accounts at this office," which implies that he did provide clients with transactions accounts, which probably were deposits that did not pay interest. By 1853, Dye was calling himself a banker and, as we shall see, in 1854 he did suffer a run.<sup>23</sup>

As noted above, an exchange broker usually also bought and sold bank notes, which in the early 1850s often were bought and sold at a discount to par, especially at locations distant from the location of the issuing bank.<sup>24</sup> The size of the discount reflected the costs of returning the note to the issuing bank, where in principle it would be redeemed in specie. The discount would be considerably larger if the ability or willingness of the issuing bank to redeem its notes was in doubt. Bank notes that traded at a significant discount were called "uncurrent bank notes." Another ad for Dye's Exchange Office in the same 1852 publication was accompanied by a list of uncurrent bank notes Dye was buying, in each case showing the discount to face value at which

issuing their own bank notes, although they sometimes put similar financial instruments in circulation. They could provide other banking services, including taking deposits. Fritz Redlich. The Molding of American Banking, Part II (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1951), 73-74. Henrietta Larson. Jay Cooke, Private Banker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 36-37.

<sup>20</sup> Larson, Jay Cooke, Private Banker, 36.

<sup>21</sup> Dye's Book of Illustrations, An Accompaniment to His Illustrated Counterfeit Detector (Cincinnati: John S. Dye, 1852), 5. This publication will be discussed below. Internal evidence suggests it was published in April 1852.

This was a service commonly offered by exchange brokers and private bankers in Ohio and elsewhere in the Midwest in the 1840s and 1850s. Redlich, Molding of American Banking, 73.

Dye is first listed as a banker in Williams' Cincinnati business directory in 1853. Williams' Cincinnati Directory, City Guide, and Business Mirror for 1853, 103.

The activities of brokers were controversial, as holders of bank notes often resented their unwillingness to buy notes at face value. They were derided as "employed in shaving notes or getting them shaved." The Bankers' Magazine and Statistical Register, Vol. 6, No. 11 (May 1851), 882.

## DYE'S EXCHANGE OFFICE.

## J. S. DTS. Exchange Broker,

South East corner Third & Walnut Sts. opposite masonic hall.

CINCINNATI, O,

Buys and sells Exchange on New York,
Philadelphia and New Orleans. Pays
particular attention to collecting from
a distance, and remits proceeds
promptly at current rates
of Exchange.

## LAND WARRANTS,

bought and sold at best rates. Any person can be accommodated with a warrant transferred and insured, by remitting for the same.

but uses exclusively its own funds for the transaction of the other branches of the Brokerage business.

#### BROKERS & BANKS

from abroad, keeping their accounts at this office, shall receive by Telegraph the earliest information of Bank failures, new counterfeits, &c. 1-2 per cent. premium allowed for remittances of

#### CITY BANK PAPER.

Exchange on New York, furnished to Dealers at lowest rates. Our organization (at great expense) being now complete in all parts of the United States, we will be able to furnish the best authenticated and earliest information to those who do business with us.

JOHN S. DYE.

Dye's Exchange Office, image of the ad, with permission of the American Antiquarian Society. he was purchasing them.<sup>25</sup> The notes listed were issued by banks, canal companies, railroads, and cities in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, eleven other states, and two cities in Canada. In all, nearly seventy issuers were listed, with discounts generally between 10 and 75 percent. Reflecting the troubled state of some chartered banks in Ohio at the time, most of the Ohio banks on the list were quoted at discounts of 50 to 75 percent.

Because he bought and sold bank notes, Dye needed to develop expertise in the detection of counterfeit bank notes. Some exchange brokers leveraged this expertise by editing and publishing counterfeit detectors or by correcting, that is, reviewing the content of, detectors published by others. In 1850, these detectors typically were monthly periodicals that listed and described all known counterfeits. In Cincinnati alone, two other exchange brokers were publishing this type of monthly periodical in 1850.<sup>26</sup>

John S. Dye published his own detector in 1850, a year before he established his own brokerage firm. The earliest mention of Dye's detector that the author has discovered was in a newspaper ad that appeared on February 24, 1850.27 The title of the detector is omitted and the description of the contents differed somewhat from the finished product, suggesting that in February it had not yet actually been published. That ad stated: "Copies of the work to be obtained at the Phoenix Bank." This can be read to imply that copies of the work were not yet available. It also suggests that in early 1850 Dye may have been employed by the Phoenix Bank, which was a private bank operated by M.A. Bradley & Co. In 1849 and 1850, M.A. Bradley & Co. corrected a counterfeit detector published by Thomas W. Lord, who later was an enemy of John S. Dye, as will be discussed below.<sup>28</sup> Also, in 1851, one S.G. Langdon, who later would be associated with Dye, was employed by the Phoenix Bank.<sup>29</sup> By June 5, 1850, the detector clearly had been published; on that date an ad appeared in a Cleveland newspaper that accurately described the contents of the finished work and mentioned testimonials by bankers that appear on the rear cover of surviving copies.30

In his first detector, which Dye edited and self-published, he showed himself willing to take a different and almost entirely new approach to detecting counterfeits. This detector was styled Dye's Counterfeit Detector and Universal Bank Note Gazetteer. 31 Although this was a 79-page pamphlet, Dye needed just three pages to lay out his six "Rules for Detecting Bad Money." 32 This was a bank note reporter as well as a counterfeit detector; there is an eight-page Bank Note list, which shows the discounts or premiums to face value at which notes issued by hundreds of

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit., 6.

<sup>26</sup> Williams' Cincinnati Directory and Business Advertiser for 1850-51, 313.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Dye's Counterfeit Detector," Cincinnati Enquirer, February 24, 1850, 2. 27

<sup>28</sup> See Dillistin, Bank Note Reporters, 121-122 regarding Bradley's correction of Lord's detectors.

<sup>29</sup> Williams' Cincinnati Directory and Business Advertiser for 1850-51, 162. This assumes that S.G. Langdon is Sylvester G. Langdon, as seems highly likely.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Dye's Counterfeit Detector," Cleveland Herald, June 5, 1850, 1. As of August 2020, the only surviving copy located by WorldCat.org is held by the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland. Another copy is held by the American Numismatic Society.

John S. Dye. Dye's Counterfeit Detector and Universal Bank Note Gazetteer; with Correct Rules by which Spurious and Counterfeit Notes May Be Detected at a Glance, [etc.] (Cincinnati: John S. Dye, E. Morgan & Co., Stereotypers, 1850). Dillistin claimed in 1949 that another edition was published in 1850 in Philadelphia by Joseph Arnold. Dillistin, Bank Note Reporters, 102. However, in 2020 this author was unable to locate a copy of a Philadelphia edition.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 6-8.

# DYE'S

# COUNTERFEIT DETECTOR

AND

UNIVERSAL BANK NOTE GAZETTEER;

WITH CORRECT RULES BY WHICH

SPURIOUS AND COUNTERFEIT NOTES MAY BE

DETECTED AT A GLANCE.

--- A L S O ----

A LIST OF ALL THE FRAUDULENT AND BROKEN BANKS AND ALTERED NOTES; AND A LIST OF ALL THE SOLVENT BANKS, WITH RATES OF DISCOUNT.

CINCINNATI:
PUBLISHED BY JOHN S. DYE.

1850.

E. MORGAN & Co., Stereotypers.

banks were being bought by brokers in Cincinnati.<sup>33</sup> Much of the rest of the pamphlet was given over to a set of Gold and Silver Coin Tables that depicted the variety of U.S. and foreign coins then in circulation.<sup>34</sup>

Dye began this detector with a discussion of the inherent limitations of the existing monthly detectors. First, with so many counterfeit notes to describe, the descriptions given in the existing detectors necessarily were generally vague and indefinite. Second, with a detector typically published only once a month, counterfeits could be in circulation long before they were described in the detector.<sup>35</sup> Third, once a detector identified the flaws in a counterfeit that allowed it to be distinguished from a genuine note, the counterfeiter was made aware of his mistake and could quickly correct it. Testimonials from bankers and prominent public figures that appeared on the rear wrapper of this detector assured the public that "any person, thoroughly understanding his [Dye's] rules, can never be imposed upon by counterfeit or altered bank notes."

Rule I was to look at the general appearance of the note, whether the engraving "does not present a fair standing out to the eye, like a well painted picture." Perhaps more helpful, it recommended that if there are any human figures on the note, "examine the eyes, see if they look natural and show the whites, or whether there are mere dots in the place of eyes. Counterfeiters hardly ever do anything on the eyes, for the reason that the human countenance is the hardest of all things to do well...."

Rule II directed the user to "next examine the hair of the human head; see if it lays natural and easy; if it is represented as smooth, it will be perfectly so on the genuine note ... while on the counterfeits it will look daubed, as though it had been done with a brush, not strands; or, if there be strands at all, they will be scratched and rough, as though matted together."

Rule III focused on medallion heads or work, which often appeared on notes, even if human figures (with eyes and hair) do not. Dye observed that on genuine notes medallion work "is done with a ruling engine [a special piece of machinery], and has a remarkably smooth and even appearance, and it is impossible to imitate them perfectly, as the work, when done by hand, always looks dull and scratchy...."

Rule IV related to the shape of the limbs and proportioned size of man and animal figures, "[C]ounterfeiters invariably make failures in the size and proportionateness of the limbs. Look

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 19-26. Bank note tables published by others in counterfeit detectors or newspapers usually identified a specific broker as the source of the quoted prices, but Dye does not identify a specific source. As noted above, Dye does not seem to have established his own brokerage firm until 1851. Perhaps these quotes were merely Dye's impressions of the prices at which brokers in Cincinnati were buying the various notes.

Publishers of counterfeit detector periodicals often issued an annual coin chart manual as a supplement to their detectors. Dillistin, Bank Note Reporters, 152. As will be discussed below, Dye began issuing a separate coin chart

Detectors published in Cincinnati and elsewhere in the West usually were published monthly, but some eastern detectors had begun to be published weekly and eventually were published semi-weekly. Also, some issued extra editions to warn of new counterfeits or bank failures.

well to this, and if you see disproportion, you may be certain that the bill is counterfeit."

Rule V focused on the letters that appear on a bank note: "Almost all bank paper has ruled shading about the letters.... Therefore, the first or principal thing to examine, is the title or name of the bank.... In most counterfeits the letters are badly shaped, and do not always stand straight, but will lean one way or another.... Notice also the 'imprint,' or names of the engraving company.... Counterfeiters seldom take pains to do this well, and if it can be seen plainly, it will be sufficient to detect a bad note."

Rule VI addressed altered notes, where the denomination of a genuine note has been raised, say from one to ten, or the name of the bank has been changed, from that of a broken bank to that of a sound bank. Raised notes "usually are detected by holding the bill up to the light, when the alteration will show in the thickness of the paper [where a piece of paper indicating the higher denomination has been pasted over where the true denomination had appeared]." Where the name and location of the issuing bank has been altered, "an examination, according to the rules [I-V above] will enable a person to detect the alteration."

This rules-based approach to detecting counterfeits was not entirely new. Late in 1849, one Henry C. Foote of New York City published his *Universal Counterfeit Bank Note Detector*, <sup>36</sup> which seems to have been the first rules-based detector.<sup>37</sup> There are many similarities between Foote's rules and Dye's rules, and Dye may well have had knowledge of Foote's rules when formulating his own. Foote's detector seems to have appeared in November 1849.<sup>38</sup> As discussed above, Dye's detector seems to have appeared on the market sometime between late February and early June 1850.

Both sets of rules shared the same fundamental premise: Counterfeiters did not have access to the costly machinery and skilled employees used by bank note engraving companies, and thus faced insurmountable difficulties in their attempts to make perfect imitations of genuine notes. Foote seemed to have understood better than Dye the machinery used by engraving companies in making bank note plates. Of his eight rules for detecting counterfeits, Foote emphasized that the first three are "infallible." They related to use of the Geometric Lathe to produce interwoven eccentric circles, the use of the Ruling Engine to produce shading of letters, and the use of Medallion Ruling to imitate the raised impressions on medals and coins. In each case, Foote provided illustrations of the "inevitable" imperfections that distinguish the counterfeit from the genuine note. But some of Dye's rules, notably his Rule IV relating to the size and proportionateness of limbs of human and animal figures on notes, are not to be found in Foote's detector and presumably reflect Dye's own experience detecting counterfeits. Also, while Foote's technical discussions are more precise, they may have been less understandable to a broad range of users of the detector. Finally, even if Dye's detector was not original, Dye understood the merits of Foote's rules-based approach well before publishers of periodical counterfeit detectors.39

<sup>36</sup> H[enry]. C. Foote. The Universal Counterfeit Bank Note Detector, at Sight, a System of Infallible Detection, Applicable to All Modern Plates of All Banks in the U.S. Now in Circulation or Hereafter Issued. Complete in Eight Rules, with Diagrams for Self-Instruction (New York: Oliver & Brother, 1849).

In any event, efforts by the author have not discovered an earlier rules-based detector. 37

<sup>38</sup> Newark Daily Advertiser, November 2, 1849, 2.

Over the next fifteen years, many counterfeit detectors were published that took a rules-based approach and 39 set out rules that were similar to Foote's. A far from complete list includes: George Peyton. How to Detect Counterfeit

Foote's and Dye's approaches also shared a fundamental weakness. Their premise that counterfeiters did not have access to printing plates manufactured by bank note engraving companies was being disproven with increasing frequency. Both seem to have been aware of this. In the conclusion to his detector, Foote admitted that "it is sometimes possible for a counterfeit to have stolen genuine dies in it." But he nonetheless insisted: "I have never yet seen a counterfeit plate but that...these rules would condemn it at sight."40 Immediately following presentation of his six rules, Dye added a note of caution regarding the use of such dies and plates by counterfeiters but claimed their use was not widespread:41

Sometimes counterfeiters get into their possession genuine dies, or by forged certificates, get genuine engravers to make a plate on an imaginary bank, then put them in circulation; however, the cases above stated are but few, and I will give a list of all the genuine dies and plates that counterfeiters have in their possession, which, by-the-bye, are very few.

He then attempted to deliver on this promise by providing two pages of descriptions of notes produced from plates that had been stolen or from plates of broken banks that had been altered to make it appear that the notes had been issued by solvent banks with different names or in different locations.

Foote published at least four editions of his detector between 1849 and 1852, but the later editions did not differ materially from the first edition. Dye never published a second edition of his detector of 1850. Perhaps its sales were disappointing, owing at least in part to the competition from Foote.

Instead, notwithstanding his observations regarding the inherent limitations of periodical counterfeit detectors, in 1851 Dye began publishing his own semi-monthly periodical counterfeit detector. According to a contemporary report in the Cincinnati Enquirer, the first issue was dated February 15, 1851. The first three issues were called the Counterfeit Detector and Commercial Reporter, and it was an immediate commercial success:42

Mr. John S. Dye, of this city, has just entered the field of Publication with his new monthly and semi-monthly 'Counterfeit Detector and Commercial Reporter,' the first three numbers of which he has laid before us....Its circulation in this city is now larger than that of any other work of the kind, although the first number was issued no longer ago than the 15th of February last.

At some later date, Dye renamed his periodical Dye's Bank Mirror and Illustrated Counterfeit Detector. The author has been unable to locate a surviving copy of the Counterfeit Detector and

Bank Notes, [etc.] (New York: Published by the Author, 1856); H.G. Eastman. Counterfeit Money Detected. The Most Infallible System of Detecting Counterfeit and Altered Bank Notes [etc.] (Oswego, NY: Daily Palladium Office, [1857?]; T.H. Gilbert and C.R. Jones. Everybody's Counterfeit Detecting Expositor, [etc.] (Philadelphia: Whiting & Co., 1862); Lyman Bennett. Observations upon the Method of Bank Note Manufacture, with Unerring Rules for the Detection of Counterfeit and Spurious Paper Currency, of All Kinds (Chicago: Tribune Printers, 1864); Laban Heath. Heath's Infallible Counterfeit Detector at Sight, [etc.] (Boston: Published by Laban Heath, 1864); E.S. Howland. Howland's Infallible Counterfeit Bank Note Detector at Sight (Chicago: Tribune Co., 1867). This genre of counterfeit detector has been studied inadequately and deserves its own Dillistin.

<sup>40</sup> Foote, Universal Bank Note Counterfeit Detector, 14-15.

Dye, Dye's Counterfeit Detector and Universal Bank Note Gazetteer, 8. 41

<sup>42</sup> "Dye's New Counterfeit Detector," Cincinnati Enquirer, March 16, 1851, 2.

Commercial Reporter. 43 The earliest surviving copy of the Bank Mirror the author has located is the November 1, 1852 issue. 44 That copy is numbered Volume II, Number 18. Because this periodical was published semi-monthly, usually on the 1st and 15th of the month, this is consistent with the first issue appearing on February 15, 1851, albeit initially under a different name. Searches of digital newspaper databases reveal no mention of the Bank Mirror until April 2, 1852, so perhaps the name change took effect on April 1.45 Thereafter, newspapers frequently mentioned Dye's Bank Mirror, sometimes to extol the virtues of the publication and other times to alert their readers to new counterfeits that had been reported in the *Bank Mirror*.

Although Dye abandoned his rules-based detector in favor of publishing a periodical counterfeit detector, he continued to be an innovator. Specifically, Dye's use of illustrations of the differences between counterfeit and genuine notes differentiated it from all earlier counterfeit detectors, which seem to have relied solely on verbal descriptions. Even the first issues of his periodical that appeared in February and March of 1851 apparently featured illustrations. The article in the Cincinnati Enquirer noted above stated: "The engravings of counterfeit notes and dies already exhibited augur well for that portion of the work still to come."46 However, the surviving issues of the Bank Mirror from 1852 had only a few illustrations of new or especially dangerous counterfeits, perhaps because of the cost of producing them.<sup>47</sup> Within the next few years, at least two competing illustrated detectors appeared on the market.<sup>48</sup> In 1852 and 1853 Dye came up with what undoubtedly was a more cost-effective means of providing illustrations; he published an annual book of illustrations as a supplement to the semi-monthly Bank Mirror. Dye continued to publish the *Bank Mirror* until at least April 1856.<sup>49</sup>

Dye's Book of Illustrations; an Accompaniment to His Illustrated Counterfeit Detector; for 1852 probably was issued about the same time as the first issue of the Bank Mirror, which, as noted above, was probably issued on April 1, 1852. It could not have been issued before late March, as a statistical table in the book was dated March 15, 1852.<sup>50</sup> The book's coverage was still rather limited; there were ten pages of illustrations of twenty-nine counterfeit bank notes.

Publishers of periodicals that identified counterfeits often published an annual supplement for subscribers known as a coin chart manual.<sup>51</sup> Dye was no exception. Beginning in 1851 he published Dye's Gold and Silver Coin Chart Manual, which was sent, free of charge, to all subscribers to "Dye's Counterfeit Detector." The use of that name for Dye's detector in 1851 supports the

<sup>43</sup> No copy was located by WorldCat.org or at the American Antiquarian Society (AAS) as of May 2020.

Held by AAS and accessed via GenealogyBank.com. AAS holds eight different issues of Dye's Bank Mirror, several of which are cited below. The American Numismatic Society holds three issues and Harvard University holds two.

The author searched GenealogyBank.com and Newspapers.com. The earliest reference to Dye's Bank Mirror 45 was in the April 2, 1852 issue of Organ of the Temperance Reform (Cincinnati, OH).

<sup>46</sup> 

<sup>47</sup> Copies of the November 1 and November 15 issues are held by AAS.

According to Dillistin (p. 150), Kennedy and Brothers of Pittsburgh began publishing Kennedy's Fac Simile Counterfeit Note Detector in 1853. Although missed by Dillistin, in 1856 the aforementioned Thomas W. Lord of Cincinnati published Lord's Pictorial Safeguard (Cincinnati: Thomas R. Lord & Co, 1856).

The latest issue the author has located is the April 15, 1856 issue (Vol. V, No. 24), held by AAS. 49

<sup>50</sup> Op. cit., 6.

<sup>51</sup> Dillistin, Bank Note Reporters, 152.

John S. Dye. Dye's Gold and Silver Coin Chart Manual (Cincinnati: Published by John S. Dye, Ben Franklin 52 Printing House, Printers, 1851). The Newman Numismatic Portal has a digital copy of this publication and also

conclusion reached above that he did not change the name to Bank Mirror until 1852. In addition to facsimiles of all U.S. and foreign coins then circulating in the United States, it provided a four-page Broken Bank List.53 The list had been "corrected with great care" by John S. Dye, Exchange Broker, confirming that his exchange office was up and running in 1851. For banks not yet liquidated, the list in most instances quoted prices (discounts to face value) at which the notes were bought at Dye's Exchange Office. From 1852 through 1856, Dye published similar coin chart manuals as supplements to Dye's Bank Mirror.

By late 1852, John S. Dye was approaching the height of his success in Cincinnati as an exchange broker and publisher of counterfeit detectors. He celebrated his success by publishing a massive and visually stunning advertising broadside.<sup>54</sup> Printed by Cincinnati's Ben Franklin Steam Printing Establishment in red and black ink and featuring shaded letters like those used on bank notes, it is approximately 36 inches tall and 24 inches wide. At the top of the broadside the title of Dye's periodical counterfeit detector appears in 1-1/2-inch black and red letters. Just beneath is a nine-inch by twelve-inch woodcut image of the building housing his Cincinnati exchange office. In the street scene in front of the building, barrels of what appear to be gold bars are being wheeled into his office and signs and banners tout the circulation of his detector, which is claimed to be 52,000. To the sides of the woodcut of his office building are two lists of the names of 70 or so banks and other issuers of notes in Ohio, thirteen other states, and Canada, whose uncurrent notes Dye's exchange office would buy at the quoted discounts. Beneath the image of the exchange office are set out the terms of subscription to the Bank Mirror (\$2.00 per annum for semi-monthly editions, \$1.50 for monthly editions). The broadside indicates that with a subscription to the counterfeit detector came the book of illustrations, a magnifying glass, and a coin book. Beneath the terms of subscription is a seven-inch by eight-inch woodcut of a crowd of men in top-hats standing in front of Dye's Exchange Office studying copies of the Bank Mirror. To the sides and below that image are testimonials to the quality of Dye's publications by bankers and "monetary men." that is, exchange brokers, located in Cincinnati and throughout Ohio and in New York City.

In the first half of 1853, Dye morphed from a broker to a private banker and made further improvements to his counterfeit detectors. His evolution from broker to banker can be traced in the Bank Mirror, which included an ad for Dye's Exchange Office in each issue. The February 1, 1853 issue refers to him as an exchange broker, but the June 1, 1853 issue refers to him as a banker and broker. A comparison of those two ads shows he had expanded the list of cities on which he offered exchange (checks payable upon presentation) from just two (New York and Philadelphia) to nine (New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Louisville, and Memphis). Although not stated in the June 1 ad, events later that year indicate he had also begun taking deposits and, in at least one instance, acting as a redemption agent for a "foreign bank," that is, a bank chartered in another state but without authorization from the state of Ohio to circulate notes there.

As to improvements to his counterfeit detectors, in late May 1853 Dye issued Dye's Book

editions of Dye's Coin Chart Manual for 1854 and 1855.

<sup>53</sup> "Broken bank" was the term then in use to designate a bank that had failed.

John S. Dye, Dye's Bank Mirror and Illustrated Counterfeit Detector, Published by John S. Dye, Exchange Broker, S.E. 54 Cor. Walnut & Third Sts., [etc.] (Cincinnati: Ben Franklin Steam Printing Establishment, [1852]).

# DYE'S BANK MIRROR

COUNTERFEIT DE





UNCURRENT

TEN

Published by JOHN S. DYE, Exchange Broker, S. E. Cor. Walnut & Third Sts.

CINCINNATI.

COUNTERPEIT X OHIO TEN.

TEN STATE BANK OHIO



AND THE LARGEST



ROME,
DUS FROM THE RVINS OF POMPEH,

UNPARALLELED INCREASE

CAPITAL,

EXPIRATION OF CHARTER,

Buited States

CANADA,

TWO THOUSAND DOLLARS

To this work has induced the Proposess
INCREASED EXPENSE VALUABLE STATISTICAL INFORMATION







































SO WELL ESTABLISHED Recommendations of BANKERS

MONETARY MEN,

BUSINESS MEN,

Counterfeit. FRATUULEUF,

Broken Bank Notes DETRIMENT U. INUDSANUS







OPINIONS OF BANKERS AND MONETARY MEN.

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Clinton Bank of Columbus. A Zazor U, 1821. In the standard Columbus. A Zazor U, 1821. In the standard Cycle Device Columbus. A Columbus Co











of Bank Note Plates, an Accompaniment to His Illustrated Bank Mirror. 55 This publication represents Dye's first serious effort to address the growing threat posed by counterfeiters' use of plates and dies created by bank note engraving companies to print spurious notes, that is, notes that bore no resemblance to genuine notes of the banks that were the purported issuers of the notes. As the number of banks in the United States exploded and their notes often circulated at great distances from the location of the issuer, recipients of notes often were unfamiliar with the appearance of genuine notes and thus were increasingly vulnerable to spurious notes. When counterfeiters got ahold of genuine plates, often after the bank for which they were made had failed, they would simply hammer out the name of the city or town in which the bank was located and insert a new location. Because many banks in different locations used the same name, such as Commercial Bank, Exchange Bank, Farmers Bank, Manufacturers Bank, Mechanics Bank, Merchants Bank, Peoples Bank, or Union Bank, <sup>56</sup> one misappropriated plate could produce a bumper crop of spurious notes, which, because they were printed from plates produced by bank note engraving companies, might readily be accepted as genuine notes. Thus, these notes were the most dangerous of the many counterfeit and spurious notes in circulation.

Dye's Book of Bank Note Plates was a vast improvement on the book of illustrations he had published a year earlier. Interestingly, the cover featured a portion of the same woodcut of a crowd of men studying the Bank Mirror that graced the 1852 advertising broadside. It was more than three times the length of the 1852 book and illustrated more than twice as many counterfeit and spurious notes, including nine full-size illustrations of spurious notes. Another six pages illustrated stolen dies created by Durand & Co. of New York City, a leading bank note engraving company, that were being used by counterfeiters to manufacture spurious notes. Dye's pride in the book is evident in the announcement of its publication in the June 1 issue of the Bank Mirror:

We have just issued, a few days since, our Book of Bank Note Plates. It has been much labor and expense to complete it, and it is the first and only work of the kind from the American press, and we had to delay its issue for valuable full-length spurious notes; but the value it will be to our subscribers, will fully recompense our readers for its delay.... We have had to strike 100,000 copies, and the edition is nearly all circulated.

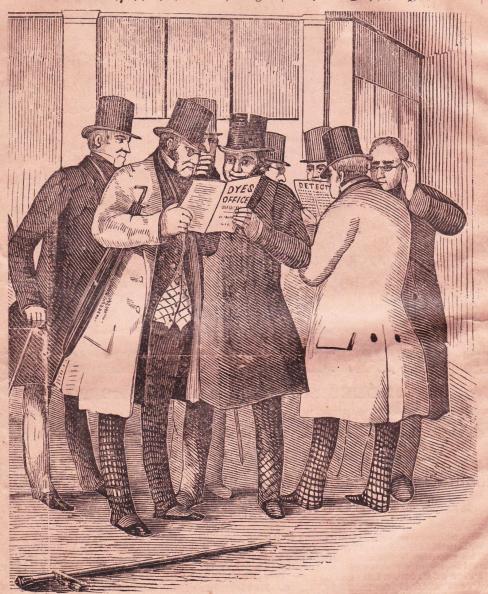
This was to be the last book of plates Dye published. His evolution from broker to banker would create legal and financial difficulties later in 1853 and in 1854 that would prompt him to move his brokerage and publishing businesses to New York City over the course of 1854. Once in New York, he would be the first to publish an entirely new approach to detecting spurious notes.

<sup>55</sup> John S. Dye. Dye's Book of Bank Note Plates, an Accompaniment to His Illustrated Bank Mirror (Cincinnati: Published by John S. Dye, Banker and Broker, Ben Franklin Office Print, 1853).

James A. Haxby, Standard Catalog of United States Obsolete Notes, 1782-1866 (Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 1988), Vol. 4, 2687-2702. The master index to this work shows how frequently banks in different locations used the same name.

# DYE'S BOOK BANK NOTE PLATES,

An Accompaniment to his Illustrated Bank Mirror.



FIRST EDITION, 100,000 COPIES.

SINGLE COPIES FIFTY CENTS EACH.

PUBLISHED BY JOHN S. DYE, BANKER AND BROKER,

SOUTH-EAST CORNER THIRD AND WALNUT STS.

CINCINNATI, OHIO

BEN FRANKLIN OFFICE PRINT, CINCINNATE



#### DYE WEATHERS A STORM IN 1853

As John S. Dye transformed himself from broker to banker in the spring and summer of 1853, he made what proved to be a fateful decision. In July, he entered into an arrangement with the City Exchange Company of Memphis under which Dye agreed to redeem the company's notes at his banking office in Cincinnati, thereby facilitating circulation of the notes in Cincinnati and elsewhere in Ohio. The name of Dye's Banking House figured so prominently on the note that holders might well have had the impression that the note had been issued by Dye himself. In any event, holders of the note clearly were looking to Dye, not the Exchange Company in Memphis, for payment. The note shown above is a one dollar note, purportedly issued in Memphis on July 11, 1853.<sup>57</sup>

In so doing, Dye was clearly in violation of an Ohio law of March 12, 1845 entitled "An Act to Prohibit Unauthorized Banking and the Circulation of Unauthorized Banking Paper." That law and similar laws passed in the next few years prohibited banks and brokers in the state from "banking on the currency of other states" and furthermore prohibited the circulation of foreign notes, that is, notes issued by banks or other companies chartered by other states, of denominations under \$5. Although these laws were not enforced, they remained on the books.<sup>58</sup> Worse yet, the authority of City Exchange Company to issue circulating notes could be questioned. Its charter simply stated that the "company shall be vested with all the powers, rights and privileges granted to the Memphis City Hotel in their act of incorporation," and the act of incorporation of the hotel

These notes are sometimes misdated as having been issued in 1846 because the note states the Exchange Company of Memphis was chartered by the state of Tennessee on January 26, 1846. Dye did not start his exchange office until 1850 at the earliest and did not refer to it as a banking office before 1853.

Charles Clifford Huntington. *A History of Banking and Currency in Ohio before the Civil War* (Columbus, OH: F.J. Heer Printing Co., 1915), 218-19.

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made no mention of banking or issuing notes that would circulate as currency.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, the Exchange Company's right to issue notes seems to have been accepted in Memphis, where a local newspaper had earlier quoted the notes as trading at par.<sup>60</sup>

On July 24, 1853, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* published an article entitled "Scheme to Plunder Labor." It asserted that the City Exchange Company notes, payable at John S. Dye's Banking Office, were "a worthless or rotten 'wild cat' or catamount currency [italics in the original]." It noted that the City Exchange Company's charter did not empower it to circulate notes as money and that *Dye's Bank Mirror* had quoted notes payable at his office at par. It was harshly critical of Dye: "We are sorry that Mr. Dye allowed himself to engage in this business. It will ruin the character and credit of his Detector... Mr. Dye must suffer the doubts and not unlikely the denunciations of [the] community, so long as he is a party to this unwarranted and illegal scheme to get good money of the laboring class, and so long as he lends the pages of his Bank Mirror to bolster it up." In an article that appeared a week later, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* encouraged a run on Dye's banking office and sought to enlist newspapers throughout the West in its campaign: 62

Our advice to the bill-holder is, return them immediately for redemption and take no more. The *Sun*, *Enquirer*, *Gazette* and *Commercial*, all leading and respectable [Cincinnati] journals, are out in severe denunciation of this shinplaster financiering.... To the entire press of the West we say, *caution the people against these schemes for plunder* [italics in original]!

Numerous papers accepted the  $\it Enquirer's$  advice, including one in Washington, Pennsylvania, Dye's boyhood home.  $^{63}$ 

The *Enquirer's* campaign against Dye eventually bore fruit. On September 24, 1853, John S. Dye was arrested for redeeming the notes of the City Exchange Company of Memphis. On September 28, 1853, he was tried for violating the fifth section of Ohio's law of March 12, 1845, which stated: "No person shall open or keep an office or agency for the purpose of redeeming the notes, bills or other evidence of debt which have been issued for circulation as money or currency without express authority of a law of this state, under penalty of \$500 for every offense...." Although the agitation against Dye prior to his arrest had focused on the questionable authority of the Memphis Exchange Company to issue circulating notes, that authority was not at issue in his trial. It mattered not whether the Exchange Company had authority to issue notes under the laws of Tennessee because it clearly had no such authority under the laws of Ohio. But neither did the scores of banks from Indiana, Kentucky and other states, whose notes were circulating

Acts of the State of Tennessee, Passed at the First Session of Twenty-Sixth General Assembly, for the Years 1845-46 (Knoxville: Printed by James C. Moses, 1846), 180 and Acts Passed at the First Session of the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, 1841-42 (Murfreesborough: D. Cameron & Co, Printers, 1842), 72-74.

<sup>60</sup> Memphis Daily Eagle and Enquirer, September 9, 1852, 3.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Scheme to Plunder Labor," *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, August 2, 1853, 2. The article is said to be reprinted from the *Enquirer* of the 24th. While numerous issues of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* are available at Newspapers.com, the July 24 issue is not. The July 31 issue of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* (cited below) makes clear that it was the paper cited in the *Pittsburgh Daily Post*.

<sup>62 &</sup>quot;City Exchange Company, Memphis. An Illegitimate Issue," Cincinnati Enquirer, July 31, 1853, 2.

<sup>&</sup>quot;A Wild Cat Scheme," Washington Review and Examiner (Washington, PA), August 6, 1853, 2.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Arrest of Dye, the Cincinnati Broker," *Louisville Daily Courier* (Louisville, KY), September 27, 1853, 3. It cites the *Cincinnati Enquirer* of September 25, 1853.

<sup>65 &</sup>quot;Trial of John S. Dye," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 29, 1853, 3.

and being redeemed by Dye and other exchange brokers in Cincinnati. Nor did it matter that evidence emerged at the trial that Dye himself had arranged for the printing and circulation of the notes purportedly issued by the Exchange Company. While Dye's attorney brought out that the man who testified that Dye had redeemed a note issued by the Exchange Company had been given the note and asked to exchange it by H. H. Robinson, publisher of the Cincinnati Enquirer, 66 that too had no bearing on his guilt. He was convicted of violating the 1845 law, was fined \$500, and promptly paid the fine.

John S. Dye defended his reputation vigorously in the October 15, 1853 issue of the Bank Mirror. The first page of that issue printed a letter dated September 30 from a group of Cincinnati private bankers and brokers:

We, the undersigned, Bankers and Brokers of Cincinnati, having seen the numerous slanderous attacks against Mr. John S. Dye, in the various papers, feel it not only an act of justice but a duty to state that the charges that were brought against him, were not for the redemption of Bank Paper, but for keeping an Office for the purpose of redeeming money issued by another State, contrary to an Old Law of the State, passed some years since to prevent foreign Bank Paper from circulating in this State. We, therefore, feel constrained to assert, from the facts elicited on the trial, that the attacks seem to have been gotten up with a view to injure Mr. Dye in his business, and destroy confidence in the reliability of his Detector.<sup>67</sup>

Dye elaborated at length on these themes in the same issue. He expressed outrage that he was fined \$500 for fulfilling his obligations [to redeem the notes of the City Exchange Company at par]. He noted that several other Cincinnati bankers had affirmed they were "in the habit of receiving the notes of Banks from other States, and redeeming the same for said banks." As to the charge against him: "[A] law was hunted up which was never intended to meet a case like ours, and which had remained as a dead letter for many years."68 Consistent with these statements, a modern history of banking in Ohio concluded that during the period in question "all the Cincinnati banks and brokers aided in the circulation of foreign notes." <sup>69</sup> Dye named the names of those seeking to injure his business: two publishers of competing detectors, Thomas W. Lord of Cincinnati,70 publisher of Lord's Detector and Bank Note Reporter, and William Lee White of Louisville, publisher of White's Reporter and Counterfeit Detector. Remarkably, Dye admitted paying Lord to quote the City Exchange Company's notes at par in Lord's detector. He claimed that when the Enquirer and other newspapers launched their attack on Dye and the Exchange Company's notes, Lord had demanded a higher payment. When Dye refused, Lord

Although Robinson may genuinely have been outraged by Dye's circulation of the Exchange Company notes, 66 political differences might also have played a role in their conflict. Robinson was an ardent proslavery Democrat, who as a U.S. Marshal in August 1853 had taken the side of a slaveowner in a dispute over a fugitive slave. While Dye's attitude toward slavery in 1853 is not possible to determine, he later was a Republican and an ardent abolitionist, as will be discussed below. For Robinson's views and actions regarding slavery, see R.J.M. Blackett's The Captive's Quest for Freedom (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Due's Bank Mirror, October 15, 1853, 1. 67

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., [50].

<sup>69</sup> Huntington, Banking and Currency in Ohio, 220.

As discussed above, Thomas W. Lord was no stranger to Dye. Even before Dye launched his competing 70 counterfeit detector, both men were associated with the Phoenix Bank in Cincinnati in 1850. Dye may even have worked for Lord in the 1840s, when Lord was publishing the Zanesville Counterfeit Detector and Dye was living in nearby McConnelsville.

ceased quoting the Exchange Company's note at par, even though Dye continued to redeem them at par. At the same time, Lord distributed handbills containing slanderous attacks on Dye: "This deed was done to raise the credit of his languishing Detector; expecting to raise the credit of his on the ruin of ours."

The attacks on Dye failed. John S. Dye's reputation quickly recovered, and his bank and detector lived on. In the January 1, 1854 issue of Dye's *Bank Mirror*, Dye waxed poetic:

Dye's *Bank Mirror*, like the beacon, has weathered the storm; and those that have trusted to its light in days that are past, have not now to regret the confidence they have placed in it. Thousands upon thousands who have been conducted safely by trusting to it for years past, are now hovering in sight, with its myriad of new companions—their mighty canvas and new ensigns, making the great sea of commerce white with the throng, weather-beaten and despised, by the bigoted landsman; it holds its head high above its revilers, and guides the *intelligent* business man into the haven of commercial safety.<sup>72</sup>

Indeed, by early January Dye, even had won over H. H. Robinson's *Cincinnati Enquirer*:<sup>73</sup>

Some few months ago, we felt called upon, in justice to the position we hold before the public, to denounce Dye's *Bank Mirror*, or rather the uses to which its influence was lent [supporting the circulation of the City Exchange Company's notes], but since the proprietor has repented and reformed [stopped issuing and redeeming those notes], 'reformed altogether,' and gives now to the public a really useful work, one that can be relied upon, we are disposed to speak favorably of it....We are credibly informed that the *Mirror* has a greater circulation than any other publication of the same character in the United States.

#### THE PANIC OF 1854 BLOWS DYE OUT OF CINCINNATI

Within months, however, John S. Dye began taking steps toward relocating his businesses to New York City. The April 8, 1854 issue of the *Wall Street Journal, and Real Estate Gazette* contained an ad declaring that John S. Dye, Banker and Broker, had an office at 67 Wall Street. In May he began alternating issuance of *Dye's Bank Mirror* between Cincinnati and New York City: issues dated the 1st of the month were issued in Cincinnati; those dated the 15th of the month in New York City.

Dye continued to operate his banking house in Cincinnati. He apparently was able to do so while spending much of his time in New York by appointing William R. Paddock as Teller of the Cincinnati office. In this case, the position of teller essentially was that of manager of the office.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>72</sup> Dye's Bank Mirror, January 1, 1854, 5.

<sup>73 &</sup>quot;Dye's Bank Mirror," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, January 7, 1854, 3.

<sup>74</sup> Wall Street Journal, and Real Estate Gazette, April 8, 1854, 3.

Wheeling Daily Intelligencer, May 23, 1854, 5.

Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, August 15, 1854, 2. The *Daily Eagle* printed an "extra" from *Dye's Bank Mirror* in which Paddock, identified as the teller, reported the failure of four Indiana banks.

Dye himself was in Cincinnati in October and November of 1854, when the Panic of 1854 forced him to depart Cincinnati in haste.

Even among those with a keen interest in U.S. banking and financial history, most probably have not heard of the Panic of 1854. That is because, unlike the well-known Panics of 1837 and 1857, it did not force a suspension of specie payments by banks in New York City or in the other major financial centers of the time (Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Orleans). In the East, financial troubles in the summer of 1854 were the most severe since the early 1840s, but panic was evident only in the prices of railroad stocks, not in widespread runs on banks or bank failures.<sup>77</sup> However, there was a banking panic in Cincinnati, especially among some of Cincinnati's private bankers, of which it had an unusually large number.<sup>78</sup>

The severe pressures on many of Cincinnati's private bankers resulted from the role they played in the circulation in Ohio of notes issued by banks in other states, especially by the ninety or so "free banks" that Indiana had chartered in 1853 and 1854 under its General Banking Law of 1852.79 As mentioned above, beginning in 1845 Ohio had passed a series of laws prohibiting circulation in Ohio of such foreign notes, but those laws were not enforced, with the exception of John S. Dye's conviction in 1852, where charges had been brought only because the issuer's authority to circulate notes under its own state's laws had been doubted. With notes from Indiana and other states flooding Ohio in 1854, on May 1 the legislature enacted a new Small Note Law forbidding the circulation after October 1, 1854 of any foreign notes with denominations less than \$10. The state made clear that the new law would be enforced.<sup>80</sup>

There was much apprehension about the effects this law might have on the general public because so many people held small notes of foreign banks, especially Indiana free banks. John S. Dye saw a business opportunity and seized it, issuing a circular that promised:81

Small Indiana Notes received on deposit at this office at par, for the purpose of sending them home for redemption. We are determined our depositors shall not lose by the effects of the Small Note Law; extensive arrangements have been completed for that purpose. We see no good reason why the institutions of our sister state should be discredited, especially at a time when capital is so much needed, when they [bank notes issued by the Indiana free banks] are amply secured by Stocks [Indiana state government bonds].

Dye's action was applauded by the *Cincinnati Enquirer* in its October 3 issue:82

William Graham Sumner. A History of Banking in the United States. (New York: Journal of Commerce and Commercial Bulletin, 1896), 424, 444.

The earliest known list of private bankers in the United States was published in The Bankers' Magazine and Statistical Register, Vol. 9, No. I (July 1854), 19-24. It lists 23 private bankers in Cincinnati, more than any other city than New York City, for which almost 200 were listed. John S. Dye was not listed as a private banker in Cincinnati but was listed at 2 Maiden Lane in New York City.

Logan Esarey. State Banking in Indiana, 1814-1873 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1912), 279-287. Free banking laws were enacted in many states in the 1840s and 1850s, modeled after New York's free banking law of 1838. Free banks were chartered under a single uniform banking law rather than by a specific charter applicable only to a particular bank and differing in its terms from other banks.

Huntington, Banking and Currency in Ohio, 219. 80

<sup>&</sup>quot;Indiana Money — Dye in the Field," *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), October 5, 1854, 2. 81

<sup>82</sup> "First Day of the Small-Note Law," Cincinnati Enquirer, October 3, 1854, 3.

Mr. John S. Dye has just returned from the East, prepared with the most extensive means to obviate the difficulty under which so great a portion of our citizens will labor.... Dye has before shown his indefatigability and honesty of purpose in catering for the public interest, and he now steps forward in a new phase of the same character—a public benefactor.

He was, however, assuming enormous risk because he was stepping forward alone, or at least not with the support of most of the Cincinnati banking community. In the same issue of the Enquirer that named Dye a public benefactor, it published a resolution of the Bankers and Brokers of Cincinnati that small notes issued by foreign banks and notes of any denomination issued by Indiana's free banks should no longer be treated as bankable funds, that is, should no longer be accepted on deposit or in repayment of loans.83 Four days later, the Enquirer acknowledged that Dye was under pressure but expressed confidence in his ability to stay the course: "Notwithstanding the draft that has been made on Dye for bankable funds, and the present increase in his depositors, evidenced by the continued rush to his office during the day, he still has an abundance of currency to accommodate all who come."84

Over the next two weeks other Cincinnati private bankers also came under pressure. On October 20, 1854, depositors, distrusting the solvency of some of the Cincinnati banking houses, made a run on their deposits. Fairly or not, the Cincinnati Gazette accused Dye of contributing to the panic: "An extra was issued vesterday, signed John S. Dye, and dated at his banking house, corner of Third and Walnut streets, which is calculated to extend and foster the fear and alarm which now prevail. We do not say that such was the purpose of the person who issued it, but such is calculated to be its effect."85 As to the contents of the extra, another paper, citing the Cincinnati Gazette, stated Dye "reported by telegraph to various parts of the country the failure of several houses, with reference to which there has not been the shadow of suspicion."86 Anger at Dye's conduct reportedly was great. One paper reported that "an altercation occurred yesterday afternoon in the office of John S. Dye, between that individual, and some citizens who considered themselves outraged by the villainous extras which he has lately been issuing. Pistols on both sides were drawn, but not used."87 Another paper claimed that "John S. Dye made a narrow escape. The People were outraged at his course, and gathered around his office, to remind him of his duties. His legs saved him!"88 The Cincinnati Enquirer also turned on the man who just two weeks earlier it had declared a public benefactor; on October 22 it said of Dye's circular promising to take Indiana money on deposit: "Don't you believe a word he says. Dye is discredited by the bankers of this city, and is set down as one who, to subserve his own interest, would sacrifice that of the whole community. He is surely dye-ing out there."89

For all the excitement in Cincinnati on October 20, 1854, the only bank failures were of two relatively small Cincinnati private banks and two chartered banks located just across the

<sup>83</sup> "Bankable Funds," Cincinnati Enquirer, October 3, 1854, 3.

<sup>84</sup> "The Small Note Law—How It Works," Cincinnati Enquirer, October 7, 1854, 3.

Pittsburgh Gazette, October 21, 1854, 1. The article was a reprint of an article that appeared in the Cincinnati 85 Gazette.

<sup>86</sup> "The Run on the Cincinnati Banks," Weekly Courier-Journal (Louisville, KY), October 25, 1854, 3.

Courier-Journal (Louisville, KY), October 25, 1854, 3. The article quoted an earlier issue of the Cincinnati 87 Commercial.

<sup>&</sup>quot;All Quiet in Cincinnati," Cleveland Leader, October 23, 1854, 2. 88

<sup>89</sup> Cincinnati Enquirer, October 22, 1854, 3.

river in Kentucky. 90 As this became evident, the excitement subsided, but it was renewed on November 1 when the Auditor of the State of Indiana issued a rather confusing circular that created doubts as to whether holders of notes issued by Indiana's free banks were in fact amply secured by bonds held by the Auditor.<sup>91</sup> The Cincinnati private bankers that dealt in the notes of the Indiana free banks came under increasing pressure, culminating in a severe run on those bankers on November 8. As Huntington recounted in his history of banking in Ohio: "The largest of these [private banks], Ellis and Sturges, together with two other well-known and well thought of houses, Smead and Co. and Goodman & Co., suspended payment in the fall of 1854, causing great excitement in the city."92

Many other less "well-known or well thought of houses" also failed, among which was the Banking House of John S. Dye. It was reported that the notes of the City Exchange Company of Memphis, payable at Dye's Banking House, had again appeared in the market in Cincinnati, and perhaps it was demands to redeem those notes that overwhelmed him. 93 Thirty years later an unidentified correspondent of a Kansas newspaper, the Atchison Daily Patriot, provided an eyewitness account of the last days of Dye's Cincinnati bank. It is quoted below at some length, in part because it gives a brief physical description of Dye, of whom no image or other description is known:

Talking of bank panics reminds us of 1854, and a very peculiar incident that took place at that time. One morning there was a bank panic in Cincinnati, and a general run took place on all the banks.... All the leading banks of the city, stood the racket awhile but before the second day had closed, they had stopped completely. In fact, nearly every bank in the city closed. Down on Third and Walnut streets, however, was the banking house of John S. Dye. The 'run' commenced on it as quick as any other and was continued persistently, but it was promptly met. The house kept open until nine o'clock at night, and as fast as the piles of currency disappeared from the counter, they were replaced by others still higher. There seemed to be no end to the resources of the bank. Mr. Dye himself—a fine, portly gentleman, was present all the time.... He walked into the front office once in a while, and rubbed his fat, plump hands as if everything was progressing most satisfactorily....

Noon of the third day came.... The 'run' stopped and men began depositing again. During the afternoon business men began depositing again. During the afternoon business men poured in, wanted to leave their money; it was raked in until six o'clock in the evening, and then the bank closed.

At the regular hour next morning John S. Dye's banking house failed to open. Mr. D could not be found in the city. He had vanished during the hours of the night. The office was opened by the officers under an attachment, and in a barrel in one corner was found about a peck of copper cents. The banker and the great pile of

Op. cit.. "The Run on the Cincinnati Banks." 90

<sup>&</sup>quot;Indiana Free Banks," Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette, November 9, 1854. This was the weekly version of the Cincinnati Gazette, and the Auditor's circular was issued too late to make it into the November 2 issue.

Op. cit., 217. 92

<sup>&</sup>quot;The Bank Failures and Panic at Cincinnati," Baltimore Sun, November 13, 1854, 1. The Sun reprinted an earlier account that had appeared in the November 9 issue of the Cincinnati Gazette. That must have been the Daily Gazette, because no such article appeared in the Weekly Gazette.

bills stacked up in the office had vanished. It has been a mystery to this day why Mr. Dye, after paying hundreds of thousands of dollars and stopping the biggest run on record, suspended and skipped out when success was insured....<sup>94</sup>

Dye's enemies among the press exulted. Newspapers in Ohio called him a "precious scamp" and a "great rogue." As to what role Dye actually played in the panic, there was considerable confusion in the press. The Ohio newspaper that called him a "great scamp" listed among his crimes that he was "the unflinching advocate of the Indiana free banks."96 But an Indiana newspaper listed Dye among a group of bankers and brokers in Cincinnati "who, for several months, have been waging such merciless warfare upon the Indiana Free Banks. The poisoned chalice is at length commended to their own lips...It is even handed justice."97 The truth probably was somewhere in between. By offering to take the notes of Indiana free banks on deposit when other banks and bankers refused to accept them, he was coming to the aid of the noteholders. As long as those noteholders were willing to maintain their deposits at Dye's banking house, he had no need to send the notes home for redemption. But when his depositors demanded the bankable funds that Dye promised, he would have had no choice but to send the Indiana free banks' notes home for redemption. And when he did so, the Indiana free banks must have perceived this as "merciless warfare." In reality, Ohio's Small Note Law was what triggered redemption of the Indiana free banks' notes. 98 and Dye's actions delayed the impact on the Indiana banks and should have given them more time to prepare for the impact. Nonetheless, fifty-seven Indiana free banks were forced to close and, despite Dye's assurances that the notes were amply secured, holders of notes of twenty of those banks suffered losses, albeit never more than 20 percent of the face value. 99 Dye's motives for his actions were some unknowable combination of profit-seeking and serving the public interest. In the end, that combination of motives led him to assume more risk than he was able to bear.

John S. Dye likely never returned to Cincinnati. William R. Paddock, who had been managing Dye's banking office when Dye was in New York, took over both the banking office at the southeast corner of Third and Walnut Streets and the publication in Cincinnati of *Dye's Bank Mirror*. Newspaper ads in early 1855 indicated that Paddock & Co, Bankers, Cincinnati, had purchased the publication and would be issuing it semi-monthly at Cincinnati under the title of the *United States Bank Mirror*. Paddock & Co. pledged to buy bank notes at the quotations given in their detector. By July 1855, Paddock had renamed his publication *Paddock's Bank Mirror*. Rather curiously, John S. Dye continued to publish *Dye's Bank Mirror* in New York until at least April, 15, 1856. By June 1856, Paddock was publishing *Paddock's Bank Mirror* simultaneously

<sup>94</sup> Atchison Daily Patriot, May 21, 1884, 1.

<sup>95</sup> Meigs County Telegraph, November 14, 1854, 3; Gallipolis Journal, November 16, 1854, 4.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97 &</sup>quot;Crash," Lafayette Daily Journal (Lafayette, IN), November 10, 1854, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Iftekhar Hasan and Gerald P. Dwyer Jr. "Bank Runs in the Free Banking Period," *Journal of Money, Credit and Banking*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (May 1994), 276.

<sup>99</sup> Arthur J. Rolnick and Warren E. Weber, "Free Banking, Wildcat Banking, and Shinplasters," *Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Quarterly Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Fall 1982), 12.

<sup>100</sup> Daily Intelligencer (Wheeling, VA) April 4, 1855, 4.

<sup>101</sup> Athens Post (Athens, TN), July 6, 1855, 3.

The AAS holds a copy of the April 15, 1856 issue of *Dye's Bank Mirror*. It can be accessed using GenealogyBank.com.

in Cincinnati and New York. 103 104 Perhaps Paddock began publication in New York when Dye ceased publication. Paddock continued to operate his banking office in Cincinnati and to publish Paddock's Bank Mirror as late as April 1863. 105

<sup>103</sup> Cleveland Plain Dealer, June 25, 1857, 2.

The AAS holds a copy of the June 15, 1858 issue of Paddock's Bank Mirror. It can be accessed using 104 GenealogyBank.com.

<sup>105</sup> Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 9, 1863, 2.

# BROKER, PUBLISHER, AND LECTURER IN NEW YORK CITY, 1854-1860

## NEW PUBLICATIONS RESTORE DYE'S REPUTATION, 1854-1855

Even before John S. Dye skipped out of Cincinnati, he began publishing an entirely new approach to detecting counterfeits, a work he called Dye's Bank Note Plate Delineator. As noted above, by the early 1850s a large and growing number of plates and dies created by bank note engraving companies had fallen into the hands of counterfeiters. The counterfeiters used the plates to create spurious notes, that is, notes that bore no resemblance to genuine notes but that passed because recipients of the notes were unfamiliar with the appearance of the genuine notes and were fooled by the high quality of the spurious notes. The insight behind Dye's creation of the Delineator was that spurious notes could be detected reliably only by reference to a comprehensive description of all genuine notes, which is what the *Delineator* was intended to provide.

The Delineator was issued in three parts and took more than a year to complete. Part I apparently was published in July 1854. The author has been unable to locate a copy of Part I, but its contents were described in various newspapers.<sup>106</sup> According to the newspaper accounts, it was a work of 40 pages that described the notes issued by banks in just a handful of cities: New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Brooklyn, Williamsburgh [New York], and Jersey City. In April 1855, 108 Dye published Parts I and II, which covered notes issued by all the banks in New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Maryland in 133 pages. 109 The first 40 pages seem to

<sup>106</sup> A search of WorldCat.org in April 2020 located no copies of Part I.

The earliest account located appeared on page 2 of the July 25, 1854 issue of the Boston Herald, which printed an excerpt of an earlier article in the New York Courier and Enquirer and the Journal of Commerce (New York, NY).

<sup>108</sup> An announcement of its completion appeared on page 2 of the April 14, 1855 issue of the Poughkeepsie Journal.

John S. Dye. Dye's Bank Note Plate Delineator; A Spurious and Altered Bill Detector, Giving Printed Descriptions of the Genuine Notes of Every Denomination, of All the Banks Doing Business Throughout the United States and British North America. Parts I and II (New York: Printed at the Offices of "Dye's Bank Mirror," 172 Broadway, N.Y., 1855). As of May 7, 2020, WorldCat.org located two copies, one held by the University of Chicago and the other by the University of South Carolina. Another copy, possibly the only one in private hands, was sold in May 2020 by Kolbe & Fanning, Numismatic Booksellers.

have used the same plates used to print Part I. The contents of those first 40 pages are just as described in the newspaper accounts of Part I. Each of the first 39 pages provides delineations of 27 bank note plates, arranged in nine rows and three columns. Page 40 has only 22 delineations. At the bottom, in place of what might have been another four delineations, is an ad for a New York City printing company.

The last space is devoted to a remarkable statement that reveals Dye's continuing anger at the banking laws of Ohio, which had cost him \$500 in 1853 and from which he fled in 1854: "We do not think it necessary to insert vignettes of the CINCINNATI BANKS, as they are compelled by oppressive laws to wind up." This statement was an exaggeration. To be sure, Ohio's banking laws and regulations were more burdensome than in most other states. In June 1851, Ohio had adopted a new state constitution that imposed tough requirements on banks, including double liability for stockholders. 110 Beginning in 1850, it imposed a series of taxes on banks' capital stock and surplus. III As a result, many banks did wind up, especially in 1854. II2 Nonetheless, contrary to Dye's assertion, most Cincinnati and other Ohio banks did not wind up.

The front cover of Parts I and II of the *Delineator* nicely illustrated its contents and how it could be used to detect spurious notes. The top portion of the cover is an image of a spurious \$5 note, purportedly issued by the Union Bank of Brunswick, Maine. The bottom portion is a spurious \$5 note, purportedly issued by the City Bank of Hartford, Connecticut. The middle portion shows Dve's delineations of the genuine \$5 notes issued by these two banks. The spurious notes have the appearance of genuine notes because they were printed from plates of the highest quality. But reference to the *Delineator* makes it immediately obvious that the spurious notes bear no resemblance to the genuine notes, and therefore should be spurned.

Dye apparently did not complete the *Delineator* until late September or early October of 1855. 113 The complete version of Dye's Bank Note Plate Delineator covered notes issued by all the banks in the United States and British North America. Indeed, it even included delineations of twenty-five Ohio banks, which had not wound up, notwithstanding the state's "oppressive" laws. It was a work of nearly 300 pages that provided descriptions of over 7,500 notes issued by more than 1,200 banks. 114 115 In the January 15, 1856 issue of *Dye's Bank Mirror*, Dye admitted that subscribers to the *Mirror* had found its publication in parts to be inconvenient and offered to send them a bound copy if they remitted 50 cents to cover the cost of postage. He noted that in response to an earlier circular, a "great many" of the subscribers had taken advantage of this offer. 116 A fine example of this version of the *Delineator*, which is bound in brown half-calf with brown cloth boards, was sold at auction in 2019.117

Huntington, Banking and Currency in Ohio, 207. 110

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 228-233.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>113</sup> Dye announced its completion in an ad on page 3 of the October 4, 1855 issue of the New York Evening Post.

John S. Dye. Dye's Bank Note Plate Delineator; A Spurious and Altered Bill Detector, Giving Printed Descriptions of 114 the Genuine Notes of Every Denomination, of All the Banks Doing Business Throughout the United States and British North America. Complete. (New York: Printed at the Offices of "Dye's Bank Mirror," 172 Broadway, N.Y., 1855).

As of May 7, 2020, WorldCat.org located no copies. However, AAS holds a copy. In addition, according to Kolbe & Fanning, three copies of the Delineator Complete were sold at auction in 2018 and 2019 and presumably are in private hands.

Due's Bank Mirror, January 15, 1856, 3. A copy of this issue is held by the American Numismatic Society. 116

Stack's Bowers Galleries. August 2019 ANA Auction, Part II of the Michael J. Sullivan Collection, Lot 11112. It is one 117 of the three copies referred to in the footnote above.

# E PLAI

The following engraved descriptions are given so as to explain the plan and manner of detecting Spurious notes. By referring to the description of the genuine it will be seen that neither of the engraved notes correspond with that laid down as the true bill. By constantly. referring to this Book, no spurious or altered note need ever be taken.

#### SPURIOUS.



#### GENUINE.

erle and	UNION BANK, Brunswick, Me.		d ag	Ship building	UNION BANK, Brunswick, Mo.	0. /o. *
	Targe letter V				. Large letter V.	
		Girl.		10.		Ships.

CITY BANK OF HARTFORD Conn FIVE

#### SPURIOUS.



Published by JOHN S. DYE, Exchange Broker, 172 BROADWAY,

Corner of Maiden Lane, New-York

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The lengthy gestation of the *Delineator* must have absorbed much of John S. Dye's time and energy. Nonetheless, he somehow found time to launch Dye's Bank Bulletin, which was a daily publication. The author has not been able to determine precisely when it started or ceased publication. The earliest reference to the Bank Bulletin found in digital databases of newspapers is October 23, 1854; the latest is December 6, 1855.118 As to the contents of the Bulletin, the only surviving copy the author has located is held by the American Antiquarian Society. Its format differs from the rest of Dye's financial publications: It is a 4-page folio-sized newspaper. The surviving issue is numbered Volume 1, No. 336, but rather strangely for a daily, it is dated November 1855 and does not indicate a specific date within the month. Designed to complement the *Delineator*, it is a bank note reporter rather than a counterfeit detector. There is no discussion of counterfeits; instead it features a bank note list that shows the rates (discounts to par) at which uncurrent money is being bought by John S. Dye, Exchange Broker. Presumably Dye's brokerage focused on dealing in bank notes and did not deal in exchange or accept deposits, as Dye no doubt would have had difficulty competing with the dozens of other well-capitalized private bankers in New York that provided the latter services.

For the purposes of this study, the most interesting feature of this copy of the Bank Bulletin is the ad for Dye's Bank Note Plate Delineator that takes up all of the last page. It documents the critical acclaim that greeted the *Delineator* by printing recommendation letters, all dated October 1855, from eight bank note engraving companies: Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson; The New England Bank Note Company; Toppan, Carpenter & Co.; Baldwin, Bald, and Cousland; Danforth, Wright & Co.; The American Bank Note Company; Jocelyn, Draper, Welch & Co.; and Wellstood, Hanks, Hay & Whiting. As if that were not enough, the ad also displays a certificate attesting that:

[I]f widely circulated [the Delineator] will tend to check, in great measure, the numerous and dangerous frauds upon the public, now so rapidly increasing.... Its importance must be felt, by those who at present are losing much by Spurious Notes and Alterations.

The certificate is signed by a host of luminaries, including the Secretary of the Association for Suppression of Counterfeits (composed of over 200 New England banks), officers of the Suffolk Bank of Boston and the Metropolitan Bank of New York, operators of the bank note redemption systems in Boston and New York, respectively, and the editor of the Bankers' Magazine, then the preeminent banking periodical.

No doubt seeking to capitalize on the acclaim he received for publishing the *Delineator* and to boost its circulation, on Christmas Eve of 1855 John S. Dye began giving public lectures on counterfeits and their detection. The content of his first lecture was thoroughly and

<sup>118</sup> Lafayette Daily Journal (Lafayette, IN), October 23, 1854, 2; Congregational Journal (Concord, NH), December 6, 1855, 2.

favorably described the next day in the *New York Evening Post*. <sup>119</sup> The *Post* remarked on Dye's showmanship:

[A] stage was tastefully fitted up, with curtains and side scenes for a panoramic display of bank notes on an enlarged scale, and in front of the pulpit was arranged an orchestra, consisting of eight musicians....The panorama of the bank notes, which are exquisitely executed on canvas ten by fourteen feet ... was much applauded during the time in which it passed in view before the audience.

Regarding the content of the lectures, Dye reiterated many of the points set out in the Six Rules he first published in 1850. As one might expect from the author of the *Delineator*, he also explained how spurious and altered bills had come to replace counterfeits (that is, facsimiles of genuine notes):

The counterfeiters are not so plenty now as formerly. On account of the great difficulty they have to contend with in the excellent workmanship of genuine bills, they have turned their attention to spurious and altered bills. For these they can use one plate for all the denominations of bills of every bank in America.

Dye later claimed he had lectured for ten successive nights at the Broadway Tabernacle and that "over 50,000 people greeted him with rounds of applause." He continued to lecture on counterfeits for perhaps another six months. In August 1856, Dye's lectures were highlighted in the leading national business periodical. Later, Dye frequently went on the lecture circuit to promote sales of his books on other subjects and was frequently reported to have put on an impressive show.

## DYE RETRENCHES AND TRIES AGAIN, 1856-1858

While John S. Dye must have enjoyed the rounds of applause in early 1856, the year as a whole was to prove for him an *annus horribilis*. The ad he had placed in the November 1855 issue of the *Bank Bulletin* noted that his great accomplishment, *Dye's Bank Note Plate Delineator*, had "been got up at the expense of \$30,000 and been three years in the course of completion." <sup>122</sup> In all likelihood, it was these immense costs that forced Dye to retrench in 1856. In the April 15, 1856 issue of *Dye's Bank Mirror*, which is the last issue the author has been able to locate, Dye indicated it was his intention to issue future supplements to the *Delineator*, as would be necessary if it were to remain an accurate guide to all genuine notes:

As new Banks come into existence, and old ones get new plates, it is our intention to issue a description of their notes in a supplement from time to time, as the occasion requires, thus keeping the public constantly 'posted' upon what the true bills should be.

<sup>119</sup> New York Evening Post, December 26, 1855, 3.

<sup>120</sup> An ad by Dye that appeared in many newspapers in April 1857, including in the April 22, 1857 issue of the *True American* (Steubenville, OH), 4.

<sup>121</sup> Hunt's Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review (Vol. 35, No. 2 (August 1856)), 215-216.

<sup>122</sup> Op. cit., 4.

Perhaps Dye shrank from the expense and effort required to put this plan into action. Within the next month or two he seems to have reached an agreement with another New York broker named J. Tyler Hodges for Hodges to take over publication of the *Delineator*. On August 11, 1856, an ad for Hodges' New Bank Note Plate Delineator appeared in the New York *Tribune.* The description in the ad makes abundantly clear that Hodges' *Delineator* was identical in content to Dye's *Delineator*. It was said to have been published at an expense of \$30,000 and mentions testimonials to its quality by six of the same bank note engraving companies that had recommended Dye's Delineator. This is verified by comparing surviving copies of the two publications. The delineations of bank notes in Hodges' book were printed from the same plates used to print Dye's.123

In future years Hodges carried out what had been Dye's plans for his *Delineator*, although beginning in 1857 Hodges renamed it *Hodges' New Bank Note Safeguard*. 124 As documented by Dillistin, many editions of *Hodges' Safeguard* were published over a period of about ten years. 125 By 1858, Hodges was issuing quarterly supplements to keep up with circulation of new genuine notes. Many other publishers of counterfeit detectors came to understand the need to publish a register of genuine bank notes in order to enable detection of the plague of spurious notes. These included John Thompson of New York, Gwynne & Day in New York, and Kennedy and Brother of Pittsburgh, among others.<sup>126</sup> It is in this sense that John S. Dye, like Henry C. Foote earlier, established a new genre of counterfeit detectors. And like Foote, who abandoned publishing his detector after a few years, Dye reaped no fortune from his innovation.

By the middle of 1856, Dye was no longer publishing any counterfeit detectors or bank note reporters. As noted above, the author has located no references to the Bank Bulletin after 1855 or to *Dye's Bank Mirror* after April 1856. By April 1856, the *Mirror* was a shadow of its former self: it had shrunk from 52 pages in 1852-53 to 16 pages, and that last issue provided few verbal descriptions of counterfeits and not a single illustration. With all his publications dormant, Dye found time for a trip to England. The July 4, 1856 issue of the New York Herald reported that among those departing Boston for Liverpool on the steamship *America* were John S. Dye and wife of New York.127

When Dye and his wife returned home, it was to further financial difficulties. Back in Dye's home town of Washington, Pennsylvania, the county sheriff on April 11, 1857 sold on the courthouse steps:128

All the right, title, and interest of John S. Dye and Mary Jane Dye, his wife, in a lot of ground, situate in Canton township, on the North side of Wheeling Street

This led Dillistin to speculate that Hodges had pirated Dye's work. Dillistin, Bank Note Reporters, 146-147. But this seems unlikely; as discussed below, Dye and Hodges were reported to have acted as confederates in other business ventures over the next few years.

John T. Hodges. Hodges' New Bank Note Delineator; A Complete Spurious and Altered Bill Detecter, Giving Correct 124 Printed Descriptions of All the Genuine Notes of Every Denomination, of All Banks Doing Business throughout the United States and Canada. The Only Work of the Kind Extant (New-York: Published by Hodges & Company, 1856).

In the catalog for the August 2019 Stack's Bowers Galleries auction of Part II of the Michael J. Sullivan Collection of counterfeit detectors, mentioned above, many editions of Hodges' detectors are well-described and illustrated.

<sup>126</sup> Dillistin, Bank Note Reporters, 142-149.

<sup>127</sup> New York Herald, July 4, 1856, 5.

<sup>128</sup> Washington Review and Examiner (Washington, PA), April 11, 1857, 2.

... on which are erected a brick dwelling house ... and other outbuildings. Taken in execution as the property of John S. Dye and Mary Jane Dye his wife, at suit of James T. Derrickson, James Gaunt, and John Clapp Jr.

Quite possibly this was John S. Dye's boyhood home and, if so, the sale of the property must have been a bitter pill. Derrickson, Gaunt, and Clapp were partners in a paper commission business in New York City.<sup>129</sup> Most likely they had supplied Dye with the paper he used to print his various publications and had extended Dye credit to finance his purchases. Dye must have pledged his Pennsylvania property as collateral for the credit, and when Dye failed to repay them, they foreclosed on the property. Derrickson, Gaunt, and Clapp were the winning bidders at the auction, paying \$900 for the property. 130

Once again, John S. Dye demonstrated his resilience. Around the time Dye's Pennsylvania property was sold on the steps of the Washington County Courthouse, Dye began advertising his plans for an ambitious new weekly counterfeit detector with a curious name: 25 Witnesses of Paper Money; or, the Forger Convicted. 131 The paper was to be printed in a large folio format of 28 by 42 inches. It would allow counterfeit bank notes to be detected at a glance and was to be printed in English, French, and German. What's more, it would contain the most perfect bank note list published (with rates of discount), a list of all the private bankers in America, a complete summary of financial news in Europe and America, and "interesting stories, from an old manuscript found in the East... [that] furnishes the most complete history of oriental life..." All this for only one dollar a year!

Alas, there is no evidence 25 Witnesses was published in any language. Within a month, Dye was scaling back his ambitions. In early April, newspaper ads began appearing for Due's Wall Street Broker, a weekly which Dye seems to have published for about two years. 132 The ads indicated Dye was advocating a return to the rules-based method of counterfeit detection that he had first set out in 1850. Although the 1857 rules are not identical to the 1850 rules, they are remarkably similar. Well aware of the flood of spurious notes printed from altered plates that had inundated the country since 1850, he now suggested that such spurious notes can be detected with his new Rule 7:

Examine the name of the State, name of the bank, and name of the town where the bank is located. If it has been altered from a broken bank the defects can be plainly seen, as the alteration will show that it has been stamped on.

If so, this would have saved Dye the trouble, expense, and heartache of producing his Delineator. More likely, Dye was rationalizing reliance on his detector at a time when he could no longer bear the financial burden of producing a bank note register.

At some point Dye expanded the title to Dye's Wall Street Broker and North American Money Guide. The earliest surviving issue located is dated December 8, 1857 and numbered Vol. 8, No.

<sup>129</sup> See the notice of formation of their co-partnership on page 4 of the November 5, 1851 issue of the New York Daily Tribune.

Prothonotary, Washington County Courthouse, 153.

Dye placed ads for the new publication in many newspapers. The earliest that the author has located is on 131 page 3 of the March 7, 1857 issue of the Mirror and Farmer (Manchester, NH).

The earliest ad located for this publication was on page 3 of the April 6, 1857 issue of the Buffalo Morning 132 Express (Buffalo, NY).

46.133 As this publication could not have commenced before late March or early April 1857, the numbering is arbitrary and misleading. Throughout his career as a publisher of counterfeit detectors Dye usually numbered his detectors as if he had published them continuously starting in 1850, the year he first issued a counterfeit detector, or 1851, the year he first published a periodical counterfeit detector. Strangely, the December 8, 1857 issue does not include his rules for detecting counterfeits. Rather, it is an old-style bank note reporter and counterfeit detector. Aside from three pages of news and the promised list of private bankers, who are stated to "have stood the test and are considered good," the 32-page issue consists entirely of a bank note list, which gives verbal descriptions of known counterfeits of each bank's notes and shows the discounts at which their notes traded in New York City.<sup>134</sup>

The bank note list had been corrected not by Dye but by the Merchants' Exchange Banking Co., which had its office in the Merchants' Exchange Building and "where all money is bought as quoted." As will be mentioned later, there is evidence that Dye was affiliated with the Merchants' Exchange Banking Company and perhaps was its owner. By indicating that a third party provided the quotes, he may have sought to avoid disputes with banks over the discounts quoted, disputes that often plagued publishers of counterfeit detectors. Dye apparently struggled to stick to a weekly publication schedule and felt obliged to insert the following notice to subscribers on the first page of the December 8, 1857 issue:

We must beg pardon of our numerous subscribers for having kept them so long without a list. Being closely engaged in getting out this valuable work, we feel a proud satisfaction that its receipt will be ample apology, and show the delay was to our mutual advantage.

The only other issue of this detector located is dated February 4, 1858 and numbered Vol. 9, No. 1.135 This issue also has 32 pages and, with one exception, the contents are similar. The exception is the inclusion of Dye's rules for detecting all counterfeit, spurious, and altered notes. There are now eight rules, of which the first seven are identical to the rules that appeared in Dye's ads in April 1857. The new eighth rule addresses counterfeits produced by photography, which were a new danger. Dye claimed the art of photography had not been able to produce perfectly any color but black. The sure method of detecting a counterfeit produced by photography was to touch the note with a solution containing cyanide of potassium. He claimed this would remove the photographic impression but would not affect the carbon ink of a genuine note produced by a bank note plate printer. 136

Dye reportedly issued an annual coin chart manual as a supplement to *Dye's Wall Street Broker*, continuing what had been his practice earlier when publishing *Dye's Bank Mirror*.<sup>137</sup> Even in a coin chart manual, Dye's showmanship was on display; among the 1,200 facsimiles of coins

<sup>133</sup> Author's copy.

<sup>134</sup> The test no doubt refers to the Panic of 1857, which, beginning in September, had swept away many private bankers.

Held by AAS and accessed using GenealogyBank.com. 135

<sup>136</sup> While Dye now espoused eight rules, others evidently continued to think highly of his original six. In 1859 George W. Hawes published the *Illinois State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1858 and 1859* (Chicago, Ill.: Scripps, Bross & Spears, [1858]). Pages 347-348 set out Rules for Detecting Spurious Bank Notes, which are identical wordfor-word with Dye's six rules. Hawes failed to attribute them to Dye.

The author has not been able to locate a copy of this coin chart manual. No copy was located by 137 WorldCat.org as of May 2020.

in the manual was what Dye claimed was a facsimile of the coin received by Judas Iscariot for the betrayal of the Savior. When it heard of this, one of Dye's longstanding critics, the *Cincinnati Gazette*, was also true to form, reportedly saying: "We know nothing of the genuineness of the above-mentioned facsimile, but we know of no person more likely to be in possession of the genuine article than John S. Dye." 139

# DYE CHARGED WITH SWINDLING, BLACKMAIL, AND FORGERY, 1857-1859

From the outset, John S. Dye's publication of the *Wall Street Broker* was beset with trouble. Indeed, Dye's troubles started with his extensive use of newspaper advertisements to promote the never-to-be-published *25 Witnesses*, out of which the *Wall Street Broker* morphed. With his finances strained, Dye reportedly tried to pay for the ads with stock certificates for the American Safety Paper Manufacturing Company. The "safety paper" that it manufactured was designed to provide security against fraud and counterfeiting of bank notes and other financial documents. The company, which had only recently been formed, was owned by Anastasius Nicholas, a Wall Street broker with an office at 70 Wall Street. Outraged by his attempts to pay for ads with the paper company stock, a chorus of newspapers denounced Dye as a swindler. A particularly colorful example was a notice posted in the *Ottawa Free Trader*: 142

John S. Dye, the Wall street broker, who advertises 25,000 witnesses [actually 25] to convict the forger, is in a fair way to have at least as many witnesses all over the country to prove him a swindler. He sent advertisements to most of the newspapers in the country, agreeing to pay quarterly. At the end of the quarter he sent them as pay certificates in some moonshine paper manufacturing company. Of course, the universal press is denouncing him as a swindler, and he undoubtedly is. His detector is an arrant humbug, and no man can touch anything that come [sic] through his polluted hands without being badly soiled.

An earlier article in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* had stated: "Our private opinion is that Dye is what is known in western parlance as 'a bad egg." To which a newspaper in Dye's hometown added: "Dye formerly had a local habitation in these parts and was never regarded as a very sound 'egg."<sup>143</sup>

In June 1859, the Weare Bank of Hampton Falls, New Hampshire accused John S. Dye and two other publishers of bank note reporters of attempted blackmail.<sup>144</sup> And who were the

<sup>138</sup> Greenville Enterprise (Greenville, SC), May 14, 1857, 3.

<sup>139</sup> Fremont Journal (Fremont, OH), June 26, 1857, 2. The Freemont Journal quoted the Cincinnati Gazette.

Washington Review and Examiner (Washington, PA), August 20, 1857, 2. The Examiner reprinted an earlier article in the Pittsburgh Gazette.

<sup>141</sup> Carroll Free Press (Carrollton, OH), September 10, 1857, 2.

<sup>142</sup> Ottawa Free Trader (Ottawa, IL), October 3, 1857, 4.

<sup>143</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>144</sup> The accusations appeared in many newspapers, including on page 2 of the June 10, 1859 issue of the *Boston Traveler* (Boston, MA).

other two? Anastasius Nicholas, who in addition to owning a paper manufacturing company and a Wall Street brokerage, published Nicholas' Reporter, and J. Tyler Hodges, who in addition to publishing Hodges' Bank Note Safeguard (the successor to Dye's Delineator), published a bank note reporter known as *Hodges' Journal of Finance*. 145 The President of the Weare Bank charged that Nicholas threatened to discredit the bank (quote its notes as purchased at a steep discount or not purchased at all) unless he paid Nicholas \$1000 and, that when the demand was refused, Nicholas' Reporter cautioned the public against the bills of the Weare Bank. Likewise, Hodges demanded that the bank contact him or he would discredit the bank. When the bank did not reply, Hodges' Journal of Finance came out discrediting the Weare Bank's bills as unsafe and uncurrent. Finally, the Weare Bank charged that after demanding information from the bank, just days earlier (on June 7) Dye's Wall Street Broker published a false report that the Weare Bank had suffered losses and that Bank Commissioners had seized control of the bank.

Reports emerged later in 1859 that Dye and Hodges had been involved in late 1858 in a scheme to acquire a large interest in the capital of the newly-chartered Monongahela Valley Bank of McKeesport, Pennsylvania, first by forgery and, when that failed, by deception and intimidation. News of the scheme first appeared in the Pittsburgh and New York newspapers in late August 1859.146 The Bankers' Magazine published a lengthy expose, based on reports in the Pittsburgh papers, in its October 1859 issue, which is the primary source for the account below. 147

The principal players in the complex scheme were Sylvester G. Langdon and Stephen D. Dillaye of New York. On October 1, 1858, Langdon and Dillaye arrived at the Citizens Bank of Pittsburgh and presented counterfeit certificates of deposit purportedly issued by the American Exchange Bank of New York City. The counterfeits initially went undetected, and the Citizens Bank purchased them, giving Dillaye \$27,500 of its own bank notes. The next day Langdon and Dillave arrived in McKeesport to purchase 1,400 shares in the Monongahela Bank, using the Citizens Bank's notes for payment. Before they could leave, however, the cashier of Citizens Bank, who had since discovered that the certificates of deposit were forgeries, arrived on the scene. The commissioners of the Monongahela Bank returned the bank notes to the Citizens Bank's cashier and voided the stock certificates.

The Citizens Bank and the mayor of Pittsburgh pursued Langdon and Dillaye to New York City and had Langdon arrested. This did not put an end to Langdon and Dillaye's efforts to obtain the shares in the Monongahela Bank. What they had failed to pull off through forgery, they now sought to achieve through deception and intimidation, and Dye and Hodges were accused of participating in those efforts. The Bankers' Magazine admitted that Dye and Hodges were not the principals in the scheme, but stated frankly: "The subordinate characters and scenes in this romance of rascality are too interesting to be omitted." 148 Dye was charged with deception. On December 24, 1858, Dye allegedly wrote to one of the directors of the Monongahela Bank, claiming to have under his control 800 shares of the bank that had been subscribed by Langdon and inviting the director to meet him in New York and to bring the certificates for the 800 shares.<sup>149</sup> Two of the bank's directors subsequently met with Dye at the St. Nicholas Hotel,

<sup>145</sup> Dillistin, Bank Note Reporters, 108-109 for Nicholas and 105-106 for Hodges.

For example, see page 5 of the September 1, 1859 issue of the New York Daily Tribune. 146

<sup>147</sup> Bankers' Magazine and Statistical Register, Vol. 14, No. 4 (October 1859), 286-295.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 293-294. The letterhead was that of the Merchants' Exchange Banking Company, the brokerage firm

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where they said Dye assured them: "If you will hand them [the certificates] over, we will secure the cancelling of stock on your books without further trouble." The directors refused, noting that they did not recognize Langdon's claim to the stock. J. Tyler Hodges then allegedly tried to intimidate the directors. They claimed that he demanded \$3,000 from the bank and stated that "I know all about your affairs, and can run you up or run you down." They declined his offer and, sure enough, he ran the Monongahela Bank down in the next issue of *Hodges' Journal*. <sup>151</sup>

Dye defended himself in a letter to the New York *Daily Tribune*, claiming that the Monongahela Bank's director had initiated the meeting with Dye in New York and pointing out that claims that he and Langdon earlier had been partners in Cincinnati and that Langdon had been involved with Dye in the publication of Dye's counterfeit detectors were false. <sup>152</sup> In all likelihood, however, Dye's reputation had been badly damaged. After all, this was hardly the first time his name had come under a cloud. Moreover, the *Bankers' Magazine*, whose account of his role in the Monongahela Bank affair was measured but unsympathetic, was a widely read and highly respected organ, not known for the scurrility for which many of the newspapers that had attacked Dye previously were well and deservedly known. If Dye was still publishing *Dye's Wall Street Broker* in October 1859, it is doubtful he could continue to do so. Soon Dye was to largely disappear for fifteen years, and he was not to publish a counterfeit detector again until 1877. While he continued to write and publish books on other subjects in the 1860s, he did so under different names.

that had corrected *Dye's Wall Street Broker*. Perhaps Dye was the real owner of this firm.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 294.

New York Daily Tribune, September 1, 1859, 5. While these specific claims were false, as mentioned above, both Dye and Langdon were associated with the Cincinnati's Phoenix Bank in 1850 and both later were private bankers in Cincinnati, and thus they probably knew each other well.

# JOHN S. DYE BECOMES JOHN SMITH DYE AND DEACON DYE, 1860-1870

Between 1860 and 1870 (and largely until 1876), John S. Dye left very few tracks. In late 1864, however, a man named John Smith Dye burst on the scene, and in 1868 John Smith Dye began calling himself Deacon Dye. Below proof will be provided of what many at the time probably realized: in the 1860s, John S. Dye assumed other names: John Smith Dye and Deacon Dye.

What tracks John S. Dye left were in New York City and in Philadelphia. He seems to have moved his residence from New York City to Philadelphia in 1867, but at least until 1870, he still spent considerable time in New York City. 153 From 1855 through 1859, Dye, his brokerage, and his publications had been listed in *Trow's New York Directory*. His businesses were located at various addresses on Broadway and on Wall Street. From 1856 to 1858 he resided at the Metropolitan Hotel. He disappeared from *Trow's Directory* in 1860 and never reappeared. <sup>154</sup> Dye was recorded by the 1860 U.S. census on August 16, living by himself at the Saint Charles Hotel at 648 Broadway.

His wife, Mary J. Dye, was recorded in the U.S. census on September 2, 1860, living in Washington, Pennsylvania, with their son, Joseph Dye, an apprentice printer aged seventeen. Of their other son, John S. Dye, Jr., who would have been about fourteen years old, there is no sign. Possibly he was living in the same area with relatives. Mary must have been renting a dwelling in Washington, as the census indicates she owned no real estate. By this time, she may have been estranged from Dye. On June 28, 1866, a Mrs. Mary J. Dye married a man named John Prigg in the town of Washington. 155 That this Mary J. Dye is the former Mrs. John S. Dye seems very likely, given that Joseph M. Dye is buried in the same plot as Mary J. and John Prigg. 156 According to cemetery records, Mary Jane died in 1889 and Joseph M. in 1897. As will be discussed below, John S. Dye married another woman in 1870.

Joseph M. Dye was to be closely involved in his father's activities for the rest of his father's life. Important to the story is Joseph's service in the Union Army in the Civil War, so it is worth recounting briefly.<sup>157</sup> He enlisted on August 22. 1862 at Washington, Pennsylvania. His age was

<sup>153</sup> As will be discussed below, the records of the U.S. Secret Service (USSS) show that Dye, a resident of Philadelphia, was appointed an operative of the USSS in June 1869 and continued as such into 1870. However, nearly all of his activity for the USSS was in the New York City area.

Trow, John F. Trow's New York Directory (New York: John F. Trow, Publisher, various dates). 154

<sup>155</sup> "Marriages," Washington Review and Examiner (Washington, PA), July 11, 1866, 3.

Author's conversation with Erin Huff, an employee of Washington County Cemetery, on May 7, 2020. 156

<sup>157</sup> His service is documented in Pennsylvania, Civil War Muster Rolls, 1860-69. Accessed via Ancestry.com.

recorded to be eighteen years. Initially Joseph was in Company C of the 140th Pennsylvania Infantry. On December 17, 1863 he transferred to Battery C of the 14th Pennsylvania Artillery. His service must have been satisfactory, as he was promoted to Corporal on May 1, 1864, to Sergeant on November 11, 1864, and to First Sergeant on February 25, 1865. With Battery C of the 14th Pennsylvania Artillery, Sergeant Dye was in Washington, DC on April 14, 1865 when President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, and he later was a witness at the trial of one of the alleged assassins.

In either May or June of 1863, John S. Dye himself registered for the draft in New York City. He identified himself as a broker living at 648 Broadway (the address of the Saint Charles Hotel), where he had been living at the time of the 1860 census. He would have been 41 years old in the summer of 1863, but he overstated his age as 44. Why he would do so is unclear. The draft law, which was enacted on March 3, 1863, required registration by April 1 of all males between the ages of 20 and 45. If his goal was to avoid the draft, he would have needed to add another two years to the age he reported.

In any event, beginning in 1864 Dye demonstrated himself an enthusiastic supporter of the Union and a bitter, some would say fanatical and paranoid, opponent of the Confederacy. He demonstrated this by writing and publishing two books, the first appearing even before the assassination of President Lincoln, that claimed southern slave-holding politicians had assassinated two previous U.S. Presidents and had attempted to assassinate others.

The first book was a 128-page pamphlet that seems to have first been offered for sale in September 1864, presumably timed to support the reelection of President Lincoln. The author was identified as John Smith Dye. The thesis it develops is set out in its lengthy title: The Adder's Den; or Secrets of the Great Conspiracy to Overthrow Liberty in America. Depravity of Slavery: Two Presidents Secretly Assassinated by Poison. Unsuccessful Attempts to Murder Three Others. [etc.]. John S. Dye's interest in politics and social movements was evident in his youthful embrace of a workingman's party and its platform of land reform. After spending more than ten years absorbed in his business interests, Dye embraced the Republican Party and the anti-slavery cause. In The Adder's Den, Dye charged that southern pro-slavery politicians had assassinated Presidents William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor and had attempted to assassinate Presidents Jackson, Buchanan, and Lincoln. He identified John C. Calhoun and later Jefferson Davis as the most important leaders of these conspiracies by what many contemporary opponents of slavery called the "Slave Power."

Dye must have regarded the assassination of President Lincoln on April 14, 1865 as the strongest possible confirmation of the claims he made in *The Adder's Den*. And, in what can only be regarded as a remarkable coincidence (if it was just a coincidence), his son, Sergeant Joseph M. Dye of Battery C, Independent Pennsylvania Artillery, was a key witness to the assassination. In February 1866, Dye came out with a new book entitled *History of the Plots and Crimes of the* 

United States, Civil War Draft Registration Records, 1863-1865. Accessed via Ancestry.com.

The earliest advertisement for the book that has been located appeared on page 2 of the September 22, 1864 issue of the *Evening Post* (New York, NY).

John Smith Dye. The Adder's Den; or Secrets of the Great Conspiracy to Overthrow Liberty in America. Depravity of Slavery: Two Presidents Secretly Assassinated by Poison. Unsuccessful Attempts to Murder Three Others. The Evidence Conclusive, and the Facts Established. Together with the Dying Struggles of the Great Southern Rebellion (New York: Published by the Author, 1864).

Great Conspiracy to Overthrow Liberty in America. 161 162 The new book updated and extended the arguments he had made in *The Adders' Den*. He told the story of Lincoln's assassination and, in so doing, provided proof positive that John Smith Dye was John S. Dye. 163 The proof is that when he discussed the testimony of Sergeant Joseph M. Dye, John Smith Dye stated that Sergeant Dye was the son of the author. 164 Below we will present additional circumstantial evidence that John Smith Dye was John S. Dye, but only because the information is interesting in its own right. With a "confession" in hand, we have no need of circumstantial evidence. Much of the other new material in *History of the Plots and Crimes* was biographies of Lincoln, William Tecumseh Sherman, and Ulysses S. Grant. 165

To promote sales of the new book, Dye arranged for the publication of a striking advertising broadside, printed in red and black, reminiscent, albeit on a smaller scale, of the broadside he had published in Cincinnati in 1852 to promote his brokerage and counterfeit detectors. 166 A graphic in the center of the broadside shows the Demon of Slavery holding a dagger and a club labeled Rule or Ruin. The Demon holds the dagger and club over the head of Miss Liberty, while a snake labeled Assassination and Rebellion curls around her head, Above the Demon the three Presidential Victims (Harrison, Lincoln, and Taylor) are in the clouds, presumably meaning in heaven. To the sides of the graphic are two letters lauding *Plots and Crimes*. One is from a man who was at the time a well-known abolitionist, C. Edwards Lester. The other letter provides another piece of circumstantial evidence that John Smith Dye is John S. Dye and that it was an open secret: the letter is from John Thompson of *Thompson's Bank Note Reporter*, who as a longtime competitor of Dye's, with his businesses in New York City, must have known Dye well. 167

The testimony of Sergeant Joseph M. Dye was closely scrutinized during the trial in June 1867 of one of the accused assassins, John H. Surratt. 168 Sergeant Dye was an important witness, because his testimony placed Surratt outside Ford's Theatre and in the company of John Wilkes Booth just moments before the assassination. Accordingly, Surratt's defense attorneys tried hard to discredit him. One line of attack was opened up when Sergeant Dye admitted that since the assassination, he had often dreamt about seeing Surratt and Booth outside the theater on April 14. The defense attorneys suggested Dye had dreamt the whole thing up.169 They also presented evidence that Sergeant Dye had recently been charged with passing counterfeit money, only to learn that the

The earliest mention of the book in newspapers that has been located was a review that appeared on page 2 161 of the February 5, 1866 issue of the Evening Telegraph (Philadelphia, PA).

John Smith Dye. History of the Plots and Crimes of the Conspiracy to Overthrow Liberty in America. (New York: 162 Published by the Author, No. 100 Broadway, 1866).

Smith may or may not have been John S. Dye's middle name. 163

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 308.

As will be discussed, Dye drew on his research on the life of Grant to write a campaign biography when 165 Grant was running for President in 1868.

Dye, John Smith. Startling Exposure of the Prime Movers in Our Dreadful Civil War, in the History of the Crimes of the Great Conspiracy to Overthrow Liberty in America! (New York: J. Croft, Steam Printer, 29 Ann St., [1865]).

Dillistin, Bank Note Reporters, 78-93. Thompson's was probably the most widely circulated of all the counterfeit detector periodicals. His publication also was the only one to remain in publication longer than Dye's. His detector was first published in 1836 and is the antecedent of the American Banker, a daily banking newspaper still going strong in early 2021. For a history of his reporter and the publications that succeeded it, see American Banker 150th Anniversary Edition, 1836-1986 (New York: American Banker, 1986).

The Reporter, a Periodical Devoted to Religion, Law, Legislation, and Public Events. Volume III, Containing ... Trial of John H. Surratt, on an Indictment for the Murder of President Lincoln. (Washington City, DC, 1867), 130-146.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 138, 140-141.

#### STARTLING **EXPOSURE**

OF THE

#### OUR DREADFUL CIVIL MOVERS

#### Great the Crimes

### TO OVERTHROW LIBERTY IN AMERICA!

#### BY JOHN SMITH DYE.



MR. JOHN THOMPSON, of Thompson's Bank Note Reporter, says of the book:

2 Wall St., Oct. 23, 1865. JOHN SMITH DYE, Esq. :

Dear Sir,-I have read your "History of the Plots and Crimes of the Great Conspiracy" with interest and the greatest satisfaction. The late horrible Washington Tragedy, by an organized band of Assassins, plotting not only the murder of the President, but of all the Chief Officers of the Government, gives strong confirmation of the evidence you adduce to prove the assassination of two FORMER Presidents, and the attempt to destroy the lives of others. The country has long needed some master mind to expose the black-hearted, and redhanded traitors whose villainy brought sorrow and grief to every fireside in the land. You have effectually done it. Hence, your book is worth more than its weight in gold.

J. THOMPSON.

READ THIS. A peculiarly in-teresting and au-thentic history of the Political trou-bles arising from the different ef-forts to form a union of the colo-mies prior to 1789; and a thorough history of the ex-citing seems that This History explains how often, and by whom assassiused in the United States as a political power to defeat the will of the peociting scenes that have arisen under ple, and co the Federal G HARRISON. TAYLOR LINCOLN "Only actions of the just Smell sweet in life and blossom in the dust."

READ THIS.

TO THE AUTHOR

MR. C. EDWARDS LESTER, (author of the Glory and Shame of England,) says, in a letter to the author:

NEW-YORK, Oct. 25, 1865.

In my judgment, your History contains the most powerful and unanswerable argument against Slave power ever written. You have exposed the blood-thirsty spirit of the Union-HATING, STATE-RIGHTS, ASSASSINATION PARTY, with more boldness, originality and truth, than any other writer. YOU HAVE GIVEN THE WORLD THE FIRST, AND ONLY HISTORY OF THE MURDER OF PRESIDENTS HARRISON, TAYLOR AND LINCOLN, AND THE ATTEMPT-ED ASSASSINATION OF OTHER PUB-LIC MEN.

You have furnished the greatest array of well-authenticated historic facts, hitherto doubted or unknown, of any writer of our Annals; and therefore your book has an inestimable value for very American citizen.

Faithfully,

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JOHN SMITH DYE.

J. Craft, Steam Printer, 29 Ann Street, cor. Nassan. N. Y.

Author and Publisher, 100 Broadway. opposite Trinity Church, New-York City.

charges were erroneous and had since been dismissed. Strangely, however, they never brought up his father's advocacy of conspiracy theories regarding previous assassinations of U.S. Presidents, even after Dye testified that his father was the first person he told about what he saw outside Ford's Theatre. 170 They may well have been unaware that Sergeant Dye's father was John Smith Dye and that in March 1866 Sergeant Dye had taken time off from his duties as a recruiting sergeant in Philadelphia to travel to Lancaster, Pennsylvania to sell copies of *Plots and Crimes*.<sup>171</sup> The reliability of Sergeant Dye's testimony seems questionable. There seems little doubt that he was outside Ford's Theatre at the time of the assassination, but it seems plausible that his memory of events that night was influenced by conversations with his father and with Surratt's prosecutors. In any event, the result of the trial was a hung jury, with eight of the 12 jurors voting for Surratt's acquittal.

At the time John S. Dye was spinning his conspiracy theories regarding the machinations of the Slave Power, he had plenty of company, including Republican politicians such as William H. Seward and Charles Sumner. Nonetheless, modern historians looking back at the period consider Dye in a league of his own. One says Dye's History of the Plots and Crimes provided "the most extreme indictment" of the Slave Power. 172 Another book on the "paranoid style" in American politics cites that same book as an example of "the importance of a patently abnormal fantasy."<sup>173</sup>

By 1867 (and perhaps by late 1866), John S. Dye had moved to Philadelphia, although he seems to have continued to spend considerable time in New York City. Philadelphia city directories show John S. Dye residing at 1521 West Thompson from 1867 to 1869. His occupation was listed as a broker in 1867, a publisher in 1868, and an author in 1869.<sup>174</sup> As discussed below, when Dye joined the U.S. Secret Service in June 1869, he was recorded as a resident of Philadelphia. Sometime in 1867 or 1868, John S. Dye stopped using the name John Smith Dye and adopted the name Deacon Dye for most purposes.

Why Dye began referring to himself as a deacon is unclear. He may or may not have been a religious leader. As discussed below, in the mid-1870s he was reported to be a Spiritualist. Spiritualism is a system of belief or religious practices based on supposed communication with the spirits of the dead, especially though mediums. Spiritualism was increasingly popular in Philadelphia around the time he assumed the new name, perhaps because people were desperate to communicate with hosts of young men who had perished in the Civil War. 175 Intriguingly, one

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 135.

Daily Evening Express (Lancaster, PA) March 13, 1866, 2. 171

Russell B. Nye. "The Slave Power Conspiracy: 1830-1860," Science & Society, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Summer, 1946), 262. 172

David Brion Davis. The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana 173 State University Press, 1969).

Gospill's Philadelphia City Directory for 1867-68; Gospill's Philadelphia City Directory for 1868-69; Gospill's 174 Philadelphia City Directory for 1869.

Drew Gilpin Faust. This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 175 2008).

of Surratt's attorneys asked Joseph M. Dye whether he "ever had connection with spiritual mediums." Sergeant Dye quickly cut off the line of inquiry by responding that "I do not believe in such foolishness as that."176

As already mentioned, Dye's History of the Plots and Crimes included a biography of Ulysses S. Grant. When Grant emerged as the Republican candidate for President in 1868, Dye proved himself an enthusiastic supporter. As early as March, the name Deacon Dye first surfaces as the author of a short biography promoting Grant as the nominee of the Republican Party.<sup>177</sup> When Grant's youngest son, Jesse R. Grant, wrote him a letter praising the work, Dye wasted no time using the letter to promote its sale. 178 Numerous editions of this biography of Grant seem to have been published. In late May, the Republican national convention in Chicago selected Grant as its nominee for President and Schuyler Colfax as his running mate. Within a week, a new pamphlet by Deacon Dye appeared that added to the biography of Grant a biography of Colfax and an account of the convention.<sup>179</sup> <sup>180</sup> This new pamphlet included an ad, which appeared on page 92, for the History of the Plots and Crimes of the Great Conspiracy to Overthrow Liberty in *America*. It shows Deacon Dye as the author, leaving no doubt that Deacon Dye was the author formerly known as John Smith Dye.

Well before he renamed himself Deacon Dye and threw himself into Grant's campaign, Dye began work on another very different project. Between November 1866 and January 1867, John Smith Dye was reported to have delivered lectures on the "Origin and History of Man" in Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Lancaster.<sup>181</sup> As in the case of his celebrated lectures on counterfeits that John S. Dye delivered in New York beginning in late 1855, Dye's lectures were intended to entertain as well as enlighten. As to the substance, he argued that Adam and Eve had a red complexion and proceeded to explain the causes of the variety of complexions of modern man. He illustrated his ideas with diagrams and paintings, just as he had illustrated his lectures on counterfeiting with a panorama of bank notes. As in 1855, he also provided music: "At the conclusion of his lecture he introduces four specimens of the African race, one pure and the others mixed, who did up some music in good style." Of Dye himself it was said that "he had a stentorian voice and laid down his dogmas with a diction that was meant to be decisive." <sup>182</sup> To further enhance his credibility, he may have made a few things up. One paper reported: "We understand that Mr. Dye has spent some twenty years in foreign lands, investigating his subject and gathering facts." 183 This can be true only if Ohio and New York are considered foreign lands.

<sup>176</sup> Trial of John H. Surratt, 141.

A brief notice of a "little pamphlet" on the life of Grant by Deacon Dye appeared on page 4 of the March 13, 177 1868 issue of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA).

Jesse R. Grant's letter, dated April 10, 1868, appeared in an ad on page 9 of the May 9, 1868 issue of the Philadelphia Inquirer (Philadelphia, PA).

The first notice of the book that has been located is a brief review on page 2 of the June 6, 1868 edition of the Chicago Tribune (Chicago, IL). The review was not favorable: "He may be a very good deacon, but he should let

Deacon Dye. Lives and Eminent Public Services of Grant and Colfax. With Proceedings and Platforms of Republican and Democratic Conventions (Philadelphia: Published by the Author, Samuel Loag, Printer, 1868). On the front cover it is denoted the tenth edition.

Evening Telegraph (Philadelphia, PA), November 23, 1866, 5; Patriot (Harrisburg, PA), January 12, 1867, 2-3; Intelligencer Journal (Lancaster, PA), January 19, 1867, 2.

Ibid., Intelligencer Journal. 182

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., Patriot (Harrisburg, PA).

To be sure, he and his wife did sail to England in 1856, but he must have returned after less than a year.

Whether because he was absorbed in the Grant campaign in 1868 or in his work for the Secret Service in 1869 and early 1870, Dye's book on the origins of man was not published until July 1870.184 He once again used the name Deacon Dye. The book was titled *Humanity: Its Fountain* and Stream. 185 Dye marshaled a curious mix of scriptural, historical, and scientific information to provide a history of how the current races of mankind all could be traced to the biblical Adam, whose complexion was red. The book is illustrated with 72 colored portraits of both famous historical figures and representative figures, the production of which may have been another factor slowing completion of the book. One of the reviews of the book makes clear that some understood that Deacon Dye was in fact John S. Dye and were well aware of Dye's past troubles. The review began: "Mr. J.S. Dye, of bank-note and bogus-money notoriety, has really made a very curious book."186

<sup>184</sup> A review of the book appeared on page 3 of the July 14, 1870 issue of the Examiner and Chronicle (New York, NY).

Deacon Dye. Humanity: Its Fountain and Stream. Illustrated by One Hundred Engravings, Giving One True and Correct Portrait, Taken from Nature, of Each Distinct People Now Known to the Civilized World: Among Which Are All the Reigning Sovereigns of Europe, President Grant, and Other Rulers. [etc.] (New York: Published by the Author, 646 Broadway and Printed by Little, Rennie & Co., 1870).

<sup>186</sup> Phrenological Journal and Life Illustrated, Vol. 51, No. 380 (September 1870), 223.

# OPERATIVE OF THE U.S. SECRET SERVICE, 1869-1870

Although the U.S. Secret Service is best known for providing protection to the U.S. President, it was originally created to suppress counterfeit currency and that remains part of its mission today. During the Civil War, Congress enacted the Legal Tender Act of 1862, which authorized the federal government to issue U.S. currency, and the National Banking Act of 1863, which authorized national banks (banks chartered by the federal government) to issue national bank notes. While many hoped the standardization of these types of currency would put an end to counterfeiting, that soon was demonstrated a false hope, as counterfeits of these new currency types flooded the country. In 1865, Congress appropriated money to the Treasury Department to spend on fighting counterfeiting. The Treasury Department reacted to this authorization by creating on July 5, 1865 an anti-counterfeiting detective force, which it called the Secret Service Division.187

When President Grant took office in March 1869, he had both substantive and political reasons for replacing the first Director of the Secret Service, William P. Wood: Wood's tenure had been marked by controversy over his employment of underworld figures as operatives and he was associated with the widely and deeply unpopular President Andrew Johnson. 188 His replacement, appointed Director on May 6, 1869, was Hiram C. Whitley, who had impressed Grant and other Republicans by infiltrating and helping break up a branch of the Ku Klux Klan. <sup>189</sup> Whitley wasted no time in hiring John S. Dye, who became an operative of the Secret Service on June 4. 190 Obviously, Dye possessed the expertise on counterfeits the Secret Service required. No doubt his service in the antislavery cause and his support for Grant's election also worked in his favor.

Around the same time that he was hiring Dye, Whitley was formalizing the structure of the Secret Service Division. He began naming a chief operative in each of the division's major

<sup>187</sup> David R. Johnson. Illegal Tender: Counterfeiting and the Secret Service in Nineteenth Century America (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 68-69; Charles Lane. Freedom's Detective: The Secret Service, the Ku Klux Klan and the Man Who Masterminded America's First War on Terror (Toronto: Hanover Square Press, 2019), 98-100.

<sup>188</sup> Lane, Freedom's Detective, 100-101.

<sup>189</sup> Lane, Freedom's Detective, 63-95. Lane's book is a biography of Whitley.

National Archives, Record Group 87, Records of the Secret Service, Record of Operatives Employed, ca. 1865-190 1871. 9.

geographic districts. Each chief operative would have assistant operatives working under his direction, and would be responsible for administrative and investigative activities within his district.<sup>191</sup> New York was at the time the most significant center of counterfeiting activity in the country, so Whitley moved the Secret Service's headquarters there from Washington. 192 In fact, he made his headquarters at the Saint Charles Hotel, where Dye stayed when he was in town. 193

Unlike the rest of his life, Dye's activities as a Secret Service operative are thoroughly documented in monthly reports that he and his assistants were required to file.<sup>194</sup> Between July and November 1869 a total of eleven reports were filed by Dye or by one of four men who were assisting him, one of whom was his son Joseph M. Dye. John S. Dye himself filed monthly reports each month from July through November. The reports provided day-by-day accounts of what Dye and his assistants were doing. What comes through clearly is that this was detective work. They pursued rumors regarding men who were passing counterfeits, discreetly observing the suspects and seeking to arrange meetings with them to purchase counterfeits. When they succeeded in arresting those passing the counterfeits, they tried to convince them to identify the wholesalers from whom they received the counterfeits. Their ultimate goal was to seize the plates and lithographic stones from which counterfeits were printed and arrest the ringleaders and engravers.

These reports document the scope of counterfeiting then occurring in New York City and vicinity. In addition to counterfeiting U.S. currency and national bank notes, there was an active trade in revenue stamps for tobacco and lager beer. Sometimes the revenue stamps were not counterfeits but rather used stamps that had been cleaned or carefully removed from beer barrels and then sold to be used as if they were new stamps. There also were counterfeits of U.S. government bonds and, in one case, of notes issued by the Bank of England.

Dye appears to have been an effective operative. In his first month on the job he assisted in breaking up the Mott Haven ring, a group that had been counterfeiting national bank notes, and in July Dye was a key witness when the ring was brought to trial.<sup>195</sup> In August, with the assistance of Robert Herring, who had turned state's evidence against the Mott Haven ring, Dye seized a treasure trove of lithographic stones that had been used to print Greenbacks (U.S. legal tender currency) and national bank notes. As he triumphantly noted in his report for August, these seizures gave "the Department control of all the lithographic stones from which counterfeit Greenbacks and National Bank bills have been made."196

Despite these successes, however, Dye's career as an operative was brief. His last monthly report was for November 1869. While he remained on the department's payroll though April 1870 and did not resign as an operative until December 1, 1870, his activity after November seems to have been limited to appearing in court to testify against suspects he had arrested earlier. 197

<sup>191</sup> Johnson, Illegal Tender, 79.

<sup>192</sup> Lane, Freedom's Detective, 102.

For the location of Whitley's residence, see "Personating Government Officers," Evening Post (New York, NY), 193 December 29, 1869, 4. Dye was recorded living at the Saint Charles Hotel in the 1860 and 1870 censuses.

<sup>194</sup> National Archives, Record Group 87, Records of the Secret Service, Register of Monthly Reports (RMR), 1864-1871.

<sup>&</sup>quot;The Alleged Mott Haven Counterfeiters—Interesting Testimony of One of the Prisoners Who Turned 195 State's Evidence—All the Defendants Remanded to Prison," New York World. July 28, 1869, 3.

RMR, Vol. 1, 295. 196

<sup>197</sup> National Archives, Record Group 87, Records of the Secret Service, Records of Payments, 1869-1911, Vol.4,

The reason for his cessation of activity and eventual resignation is not clear, but it may well have been his entanglement in a scandal at the Customs House. Dye made brief mention of the precipitating events in his November monthly report. He reported that on November 13, "I detained some laces owned by a Frenchman, who had been offering them to wholesale dealers at 40 percent below importers prices." And on November 15, "[I] delivered the laces obtained on evening of the 13th into hands of Custom House officer to await production of the proof that the duty had been paid on them." <sup>198</sup> Unfortunately for Dye, the Custom House officer was no longer in fact employed by the Custom House and had induced Dye to seize the silks under the false pretense that they had been smuggled into the United States without paying the applicable duties. When Frederick Kuhner, the man who impersonated a Customs House official, and a confederate, John W. Lalor, were brought to trial, Chief Whitley came to Dye's defense and went so far as to call Dye his "chief assistant." 199 Nonetheless, Dye seems to have suffered guilt by association. In an article titled "The Kuner[sic]-Lalor Outrage" in its January 14, 1870 issue, the New York Times stated that John S. Dye, "formerly of the Secret Service," appeared as a witness at the trial of Kuhner and Lalor and admitted he had placed the goods he had seized from the importer into the hands of the defendants. The Times article implied that Dye had behaved improperly. In this case, Dye likely was blameless. Why would he have included his actions in his monthly report if he were aware of impropriety?

<sup>138;</sup> Record of Operatives Employed, ca. 1865-1871, 9.

<sup>198</sup> Register of Monthly Reports, Vol. 2, 53.

The author could find no evidence in the Records of the Secret Service to support the claim that Dye was Whitley's chief assistant.

# LECTURER AND SPIRITUALIST, 1870-1876

On June 22, 1870, a U.S census taker recorded John S. Dye, a publisher aged 50, living in the Saint Charles Hotel at 648 Broadway in New York City. At this time, Dye's residence may still have been in Philadelphia, but during his frequent visits to New York City he continued to stay at the Saint Charles, where he had been recorded living in the 1860 census. Living with him at the Saint Charles in 1870 was a Sarah Dye, aged 31. As in the case of the Julia Dye, who was recorded living with John S. Dye in New York City at the time of the 1850 census, this may or may not have been a relative, but it was not his wife. As mentioned above, his first wife and mother of his two sons, Mary Jane Dye, married another man in 1866. On July 10, 1870, less than a month after the census taker found Dye in the Saint Charles Hotel, he married Emma C. Haering, whose age was stated to be 25, in New York City. Emma's parents were Robert Haering and Theresa Herb.<sup>200</sup>

The author has been able to discover little about John S. Dye's activities over the next five years. From what has been unearthed, he continued to use the name Deacon Dye for the next year or two. In June and July of 1871, he returned to lecturing, albeit on a new and quite different subject. Perhaps with wistful memories of his participation in the Washington Literary Society as a youth, Deacon Dye lectured for three nights (June 13-15) in Brant's Hall in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on the subject of "Homes and Haunts of British Poets." He repeated the lecture in Pottsville, Pennsylvania on July 17.201 An advertisement that appeared in a Harrisburg newspaper on June 2 made clear that the audience could be expected to be entertained as well as enlightened:202

Deacon Dye, an author, lecturer, and traveler of great celebrity, will next week present for the edification of a Harrisburg public magnificent paintings of the 'Homes and Haunts of British Poets.' To the admirers of the immortal emanations of Burns and Moore (and who are not) the entertainment will be of especial interest. Twelve European and two American artists were for years engaged in painting the scenery to be exhibited. All the scenes will be fully explained by Deacon Dye, who is

New York, New York City Marriage Records, 1829-1940. Accessed using Ancestry.com. Emma's date of birth was later reported to be December 24, 1846, which would mean she was 23 when she married Dye. This same marriage record is the source of the information reported earlier on the identity of John S. Dye's parents.

Weekly Miners Journal (Pottsville, PA), July 15, 1871, 3. 201

<sup>202</sup> Patriot (Harrisburg, PA), June 2, 1871, 1.

admirably adapted for a lecturer, having a clear and pleasing voice and possessing a thorough knowledge of his subject. The entertainment will be interspersed with piano music by Deacon Dye's accomplished young daughter, Miss Bell, who has performed in Europe to the most critical audiences and won the most laudatory notices from a foreign press.

When lecturing on the Origin and History of Man four years earlier, Dye had claimed falsely that he had spent some twenty years in foreign lands. Here he merely claims to be a "celebrated traveler," but seems to have invented a daughter, Bell Dye. The next day, a different Harrisburg newspaper added that Miss Bell Dye was eleven years old and quotes the Daily Edinburgh Scotsman (no date given) as giving a glowing review of a performance they gave in the Theatre Royal in Glasgow, which the review claimed had been attended by the Duke of Argyle.<sup>203</sup> There is no other evidence that Dye had a daughter in 1871. She could have been one of his numerous Dye relatives, but presenting her as his daughter may just have been another element of showmanship. The author also is skeptical of the claim that Dye and his "daughter" performed in Scotland. To be sure, if they did not, he showed remarkable chutzpah by trumpeting a nonexistent review in what was a major foreign newspaper.<sup>204</sup> Of course, we should not assume that his audiences were deceived by these claims. Modern biographers of the entertainer P.T. Barnum, who was active during this same period, have noted that audiences did not assume exhibitors were telling the truth and enjoyed the exhibitions partly because of the challenge of determining whether they were being deceived. After Barnum's death in 1891, the London Times noted that Barnum's audiences had "found pleasure in the comedy of the showman and his patrons - the comedy of the harmless deceiver and the willingly deceived."205 This may also have been true of Dye and the audiences for his lectures on the British poets. When Dye had earlier lectured on counterfeiting, the Slave Power, and the Origin and History of Man, entertainment seems to have been the means to the end of conveying what he regarded as vital information, whereas in these last lectures he appears to have become a truly Barnumesque entertainer.

A year later, an advertisement in an Albany, New York newspaper shows that Deacon Dye continued to promote his views on the origin and history of man. The ad stated that "Deacon Dye has prepared a very instructive and valuable chart of geology and paleontology combined illustrating the 'Ages of Nature." It added that the chart "has been engraved by Robert Haering of Wurtemberg, Germany." Robert Haering was the father of Emma Dye, John S. Dye's second wife. This provides one last (and, by this time, unnecessary) piece of circumstantial evidence that Deacon Dye was John S. Dye.

The fact that Robert Haering was a lithographer has caused the author to hypothesize that Robert Haering is the Robert Herring who was a counterfeiter and, after turning state's evidence against the Mott Haven counterfeiting ring, had assisted John S. Dye in his greatest achievement as an Operative of the Secret Service, the seizure and destruction of the lithographic stones that had been used to create counterfeit Greenbacks and national bank notes. Herring may have been a phonetic, anglicized version of Haering. And while Robert Herring's role in the Mott Haven

<sup>203</sup> Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, PA), June 3, 1871, 3.

Norrie, William. *Edinburgh Newspapers Past and Present* (Earlston: Printed and Published by the Waverly Press, 1891), 29-34.

<sup>205</sup> Harris, Neil. *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 24, 280.

<sup>206</sup> Daily Albany Argus (Albany, NY), October 11, 1872, 2.

ring is not clear, he may have been the lithographer who made the stones used to create the counterfeits. If the hypothesis is not true, this is a remarkable confluence of coincidences. If it is true, it explains how John S. Dye met the much younger Emma.

In September 1875, John S. Dye (no longer using the name Deacon Dye) was reported to be active in the Philadelphia Liberal League, one of what by the next year were nearly forty liberal leagues across the country. The Philadelphia Liberal League was formed to "effect a complete secularization of the government and to prevent any direct or indirect union of Church and State."207 Many members of the liberal leagues were also strongly opposed to the Comstock Law of 1873, which had banned the use of the mails for "immoral purposes," which included the distribution of "obscene" publications and the distribution of items used for contraception or abortion. The following January, the Philadelphia Liberal League celebrated the birthday of Thomas Paine, who had been known for his fierce opposition to institutionalized religion, particularly to Christianity. Among those leading the celebration was John S. Dye, who one newspaper identified as being of the Spiritualist Association.<sup>208</sup> Among others involved in the celebration was Edward S. Wheeler of Philadelphia, who was also a Spiritualist and who was associated with Dye for the rest of their lives.

With his embrace of the Liberal League and of Spiritualism, John S. Dye was again demonstrating an affinity for radical causes first evident in his publication of a workingman's party newspaper in the 1840s. Robert Dale Owen, who had been heavily involved in the New York Workingmen's movement in 1829 and 1830, 209 was also involved in the flowering of Spiritualism in Philadelphia in 1867.<sup>210</sup> Opposition to the Comstock Laws by many associated with the liberal leagues was often denounced as support of "free love," a doctrine with which Owen was forever associated because of his early editorial partnerships with Fanny Wright, the "great Red Harlot of Infidelity."211

In September 1875, the Philadelphia Liberal League called for the liberal leagues of the country to meet in Philadelphia on July 4, 1876 (the centennial of the Declaration of Independence) to organize a National Liberal League. By the time of the meeting, John S. Dye had become Secretary of the Philadelphia Liberal League and took an active part in the meeting. 212 In particular, he introduced a motion that the "National Liberal League recognizes and fully appreciates the noble stand which the entire Spiritualistic press has taken in defense of religious freedom and sound government."213 While the motion was tabled, that Dye offered it seems to confirm he was a Spiritualist. Less clear, however, is what exactly that meant and, in particular, if it meant that he was an enthusiast of using mediums to communicate with the dead. Recall that his son, Joseph M. Dye, had been questioned at Surratt's trial as to whether he believed in

<sup>207</sup> Philadelphia Inquirer (Philadelphia, PA). September 22, 1875, 2.

<sup>208</sup> "Thomas Paine. The Infidel-Patriot's Birthday. The Liberal League's Gala Day-A Singular Mixture of Religion, Patriotism and Women's Rights," Times (Philadelphia, PA), January 31, 1876, 4.

Pessen, Most Uncommon Jacksonians, 68-73. 209

<sup>&</sup>quot;Spiritualism. Address by Robert Dale Owen, delivered in Washington Hall," Evening Telegraph (Philadelphia, 210 PA), July 1, 1867, 7.

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. The Age of Jackson (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1945), 181-185. Schlesinger noted that in 1830 a conservative newspaper had called Wright "the great Red Harlot of Infidelity."

Equal Rights in Religion. Report of the Centennial Congress of Liberals, and Organization of the National Liberal 212 League, at Philadelphia, on the Fourth of July, 1876 (Boston, Mass.: Published by the National Liberal League, 1876), 20. 213 Ibid., 170.

spiritual mediums and had emphatically denied it. Whatever Dye's son believed, ever loyal to his father, he too attended the July 4 meeting of the National Liberal League.<sup>214</sup> It also does not necessarily mean that John S. Dye was an advocate of free love, although, as mentioned above, on two occasions census takers found him living with women to whom he was not married.

# EDITOR AND PUBLISHER OF DYE'S GOVERNMENT COUNTERFEIT DETECTOR, 1877-1881

Soon after the July 4, 1876 meeting of the liberal leagues, John S. Dye was preparing to resume publication of a counterfeit detector after a hiatus of more than fifteen years. He had been remarried for six years and about this time he fathered a daughter. Perhaps economic necessity forced him to abandon radical political causes and return to his former occupation. In any event, in August 1876 an advertisement appeared in a newspaper that stated the "Government Counterfeit Detector" was being published by John S. Dye in Philadelphia. The ad starts out by stating an abbreviated version of the rules for detecting counterfeits Dye had advocated in the late 1850s in Dye's Wall Street Broker. It concludes, however, that his new detector "is a still surer guide, for it always contains a correct list of United States securities and railroad bonds that have been imitated."215

Dye did not actually begin publishing the detector until almost a year later. Although the date of first publication is obscured by Dye's practice of numbering his periodicals as if they had been published continuously from the early 1850s, there is convincing evidence that the first issue of Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector was dated May 1, 1877.<sup>216</sup> No copy of the first issue has been located, but the American Antiquarian Society holds a copy of the June 1, 1877 issue, which Dye styled Vol. 26, No. 2 and which he asserted had been established in 1850.<sup>217</sup> It is worth discussing this issue at some length, as it provides the critical evidence that the May 1 issue was the first issue and later issues were enlarged versions of this issue but with similar contents and organization.

The front cover features an eye-catching image of Old Abe, the live war-eagle of Wisconsin, which was carried by the 8th Wisconsin Regiment during the Civil War and later exhibited at

<sup>215</sup> Wyoming Democrat (Tunkhannock, PA), August 9, 1876, 3.

This first issues were titled Government Counterfeit Detector. No later than June 1879, the title was changed 216 to Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector, which it is called in this book.

Far more copies of this detector have survived than of Dye's earlier detectors. Nonetheless, with the exception of the last dozen or so years of publication, only scattered issues have been located. In addition to one other issue held by AAS, a dozen issues from 1877-1881 are available in the New York Public Library's Digital Collections and nearly twenty issues are available through the Newman Numismatic Portal. Finally, the Library of Congress has on microfilm a complete run of the last thirteen years of the publication (1899-1910).

the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876. An image of Old Abe apparently adorned the front cover of every future issue of this detector. Above the eagle, the cover highlighted that the detector was edited and published by John S. Dye, who was a "Treasury Expert," and that the detector was an "Official Organ." Dye's name was to be on the cover of every issue, even those issued nearly thirty years after he died. Likewise, the cover continued to state that it was an Official Organ, although the basis for that claim was always tenuous and became more so over time. That Dye was an expert on counterfeiting could not be denied, although he had not published a detector in more than fifteen years and nearly eight years had elapsed since Dye was active as an operative of the Secret Service. Nonetheless, as detailed above, he was a leading innovator in the field of counterfeit detection, so the following statement was more an exaggeration than a falsehood:

After thirty years' experience as Banker and Expert, having made this particular branch the study of a lifetime, and having been the author of all previous, new inventions in this country to prevent counterfeiting, I have no hesitation in pronouncing this last effort, the greatest and the best. Its wide distribution will do much to prevent the circulation of counterfeit money....<sup>218</sup>

As to the claim that his detector was an "Official Organ," Dye printed copies of two letters he had received in March and April 1877 from James J. Brooks, Chief of the U.S. Treasury Department's Secret Service Division. The letters document that Brooks had assisted Dye in preparing the detector by providing him with information concerning known counterfeits and that Brooks had requested Dye furnish Brooks with twenty-five copies of his detector when it was finished. The request for copies "when your book is issued" was in a letter dated April 11, 1877, which implies it had not been issued before that date. In Dye's mind, Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector was an official organ of the Treasury Department because James J. Brooks, the Chief of its Secret Service Division, had provided special assistance to enable its publication. Brooks probably provided assistance because he believed Dye's detector would deter counterfeiting by enabling the public to better detect counterfeits.<sup>219</sup> Brooks probably did not consider that by doing so he was making the publication an "official organ."

The contents of the June 1, 1877 issue were typical of those of later issues. It began with six pages of news and feature stories. The news included a description of a new counterfeit \$50 national bank note that had surfaced in Philadelphia and New York City, followed by European financial and economic developments. The feature story was a sketch of the history of early banks in Greece, Rome, Assyria, and Europe. It then systematically cataloged known counterfeits of fractional currency, railroad bonds, foreign gold and silver coins, national bank notes, U.S. Treasury notes, U.S. government bonds, and U.S. coins. The information on national bank notes was conveniently arranged by denomination and by the letter and date of the counterfeit.<sup>220</sup>

From January through November 1879 the issues of Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector featured biographies by Dye of notorious counterfeiters, which included details of their operations and were accompanied by woodcut portraits of the counterfeiters. The January 1880

<sup>218</sup> Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector, Vol. 26, No. 2 (June 1, 1877), 7.

James J. Brooks was named Chief of the Secret Service in 1876 and held that position until 1888. 219

Dye explained that while any given issue of notes included notes lettered A, B, C, and D, counterfeiters typically used a plate with only one of the letters, so knowledge of the letter used enabled counterfeits to be distinguished from genuine notes.

issue announced that these biographies had been collected in a 122-page book.<sup>221</sup> The book, which he called the *Government Blue Book*, was available for sale at Dye's offices at 1338 Chestnut Street.<sup>222</sup> The January 1880 issue also included a "Notice Extraordinary" that in early 1880 he would be publishing *Due's Coin Encyclopedia of the Governments of the World*, which would contain 2,000 facsimile engravings of the coins of all the nations of the world.<sup>223</sup> However, Dye was never to complete this ambitious undertaking, which would be finished by others in 1883, as discussed below.

On June 2, 1880, a representative of the U.S. census arrived at John S. Dye's home in Philadelphia. There were found seven people, including Dye himself, recorded as a publisher aged 58, his wife Emma C., aged 33, and a woman named T.J. Hearing, aged 67, presumably Emma's mother Theresa. Four children also were recorded: an 18-year-old girl named Junietta Dye, an 11-year-old boy named J.M. Dye, a 9-year-old girl named Lucille, and a 4-year-old girl named Jennie. Information on the birthplaces of the children indicates that only Jennie, who would have been born in 1875 or 1876, could have been the child of John and Emma, as she is the only one whose father was born in Pennsylvania and mother in New York. J.M. Dye almost certainly was John S. Dye's grandson, the son of Dye's son Joseph M. Dye.<sup>224</sup> Lucille Dye was also quite likely the daughter of Joseph M. Dye, and Junietta may have been Joseph's daughter, albeit from a different mother. Joseph M. Dye may have been on the road selling *Dye's Government Counterfeit* Detector at the time of the census enumeration. In April 1878, a newspaper in West Virginia had reported: "The son of Mr. J.S. Dye is in the city soliciting subscribers to the Detector." 225 As will be discussed, Emma gave birth to another daughter sometime later in 1880.

Just ten months after the census-taker left, John S. Dye was dead. He died on April 9, 1881, and his death was announced in the April 11 issue of The Philadelphia Inquirer: "John S. Dye, Sr., the veteran detective and publisher of a counterfeit detector, died on Saturday.... His death was caused by a carbuncle in proximity to the jugular vein, from which he suffered four weeks."<sup>226</sup> He is buried in Philadelphia's Mount Vernon Cemetery.<sup>227</sup>

<sup>221</sup> Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector, Vol. 28, No. 8 (January 1880), [45-46].

John S. Dye. The Government Blue Book. A Complete History of the Lives of All the Great Counterfeiters, Criminal 222 Engravers, and Plate Printers (Philadelphia: Published by John S. Dye, 1882).

<sup>223</sup> 

<sup>224</sup> Pennsylvania Death Certificates, 1906-1967. A Joseph M. Dye was born on July 2, 1868 to Joseph M. Dye and Isabelle Hopper Dye. He died on September 9, 1910 in Washington, Pennsylvania. Accessed using Ancestry.com.

<sup>&</sup>quot;The Government Counterfeit Detector," Wheeling Register (Wheeling, WV), April 5, 1878, 4. Perhaps it refers to Dye's other son, but John S. Jr. does not seem to have been involved in the Detector until years later.

Philadelphia Inquirer (Philadelphia, PA), April 11, 1881, 3. 226

<sup>227</sup> Findagrave.com.

# DYE IS DEAD BUT DYE'S GOVERNMENT COUNTERFEIT DETECTOR LIVES ON, 1881-1910

On April 8, 1881, the day before he died, John S. Dye's last will and testament was written on letterhead of *Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector*. <sup>228</sup> The very first set of provisions dealt with the fate of his detector:

I give and bequeath unto my beloved wife Emma C. Dye three fourths interest in the Government Counterfeit Detector, published by me; and unto my Son Joseph M. Dye one fourth interest. I desire that the business be carried on by my wife and that my son Joseph should render her all the aid in his power.

He left all the rest of his property to Emma. On April 14, William M. Thompson (a physician) and Edward S. Wheeler (Dye's fellow Spiritualist and former associate in the Liberal League and perhaps already working for Dye on his detector) appeared before the Philadelphia Register of Wills on behalf of Emma, the executrix, and presented an inventory of John S. Dye's property. The business of publishing the Government Counterfeit Detector was valued at only \$400 and all the rest of his property at just over \$500. Among his household goods listed in a detailed inventory were fifteen cases of "curios," perhaps the objects he had collected as part of his study of the origins and history of man; the curios were valued at \$15.

Despite the wishes of her late husband, Emma apparently remained involved in his publishing business for only a year or two. She last appeared in a Philadelphia directory in 1882, when she was listed as John S. Dye's widow, living at the same address where he died. On March 28, 1882, she suffered a heavy blow, when her younger daughter Emma, only 18 months old, passed away.<sup>229</sup> The fact that Dye felt obliged to state in his will that he wanted his son Joseph to assist Emma probably reflected his doubt that Joseph would be inclined to help Emma, who was not his mother and was in fact younger than Joseph.

In any event, Emma married a man named Wilson Mecke and afterwards seems to have acted as if her second marriage was her only marriage. In the 1900 U.S. census, she and Wilson reported they had married in 1875 and that living with them was a daughter Jennie, aged 20. Jennie actually was Dye's daughter. Emma was still married to Dye in 1875 and Jennie was living with John and Emma in 1880, when her age was reported to be 4. Whenever Emma married

Pennsylvania, Wills and Probate Records, 1683-1983, Wills, No 361-410, 1881. 228

<sup>229</sup> Young Emma is buried with her father in Mount Vernon Cemetery. Findagrave.com.

E PLURIBUS UNUM. Keep thy breast to the storm and thine eye to the sun, [Founded 1850.] Till true to our motto the many are one. [Improved 1880.] -offe **Government Blue** Book, Dye's Lives of all the Great Coin Encyclopædia. Counterfeiters, Criminal Engravers and Plate-prin-ters, with full details of Gold, Silver, Bronze, Copper and Nickel Coins of all the nations of the globe, their operations, compiled from official and authentic records. One hundred in fac-simile, with history and exact and commercial pages. 16mo. Illustrated with fifteen life-like porvalues, and precise tables of exchange. Price, \$5.00. Ready for publication on traits, besides original OLD ABE BATTLE OF CORINTH OCTOBER 3#1862. views of noted places rethe adjustment of the relaferred to in the text. Illutive international value of minated cover, 1880. Price, gold and silver; or during the present year. 50 cents. Extra edition ready to deliver. (Salesmen supplied.) JOHN S. DYE, Editor and Proprietor. [Published Monthly, at \$3.00 a Year, in advance, with EXTRAS in case of new counterfeits between issues,] Current Funds paid to yearly subscribers for any Counterfeits of United States Treasury Notes, National Bank Bills, or the Notes of Canadian Banks, not mentioned in this publication to date of its issue. Office, 1338 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, 1880. Copposite United States Mint. ohn &, Dye, being of sound mind and Estamen and bequeathe unto my my other mixed, whereever situated. and

Wilson Mecke, she lived with Mecke until his death in 1924. Emma did not die until 1933. Emma Mecke's Pennsylvania death certificate names her parents as Robert Haering and Theresa Herb, matching the information in the record of her marriage to Dye in 1870. It indicates she was born on December 24, 1846.

Although Emma may have left Philadelphia as early as 1882, she may still have owned a majority share in John S. Dye's publishing business in 1883. In that year, when Dye's Coin *Encyclopedia* was at last published, she was listed as the holder of the copyright.<sup>230</sup> The book had been completed after Dye's death by numismatists Edward Maris and Ebenezer Locke Mason Jr. In the preface to the book, the publishers stated that Dye "devoted the best years of his life" to procuring more than 2,000 facsimiles of coins that appear in the book but died "shortly before the closing pages were given to the printer." After Dye's death, "the work has undergone a strict censorship at the hands of the most accomplished and critical numismatists of [Philadelphia] and other cities," notably Maris and Mason.<sup>231</sup>

Instead of Emma, it was Edward S. Wheeler who took over as editor and publisher of Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector after John S. Dye's death. Perhaps he took over as editor even before Dye's death; in the Philadelphia directory for 1881 he was listed as an editor at 1338 Chestnut Street, the same address as that of the detector.<sup>232</sup> One might have thought that Wheeler faced an insurmountable problem: The detector had always been marketed as edited and published by John S. Dye, Treasury Expert. What was to be done now that he was dead? At first, Wheeler simply did not admit Dye was dead. The June 1881 issue still stated it was edited and published by John S. Dye. Perhaps at some point Dye's death was announced in the detector, but an issue making the announcement has not been located. Sometime prior to 1884, Wheeler had finessed the problem. The January 1884 issue no longer stated it was edited and published by Dye. It still prominently displayed his name on the cover, stating with complete accuracy that Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector had been "established by John S. Dye, Treasury Expert." That January 1884 issue indicated the copyright was then held by Edward S. Wheeler. 233

Wheeler also provided a new rationale for the claim that the detector was an Official Organ, which continued to be trumpeted on the cover. It no longer mentioned James J. Brooks, even though he was still Chief of the Secret Service. Instead, it appealed to a higher authority, stating that the detector was "published with illustrations, under the supervision of the Secret Service, by order of Hon. Charles J. Folger, Secretary of the Treasury Department of the United States." The basis for this claim seems to have been that on December 22, 1882 Folger had given the detector permission to use two sets of illustrations comparing details of genuine and counterfeit national bank notes. Remarkably, while Folger's term as Secretary ended with his death in September 1884, Due's Government Counterfeit Detector repeated the above statement about Folger's support until July 1890.

Wheeler experienced a very different challenge late in the summer of 1883. He had remained an active Spiritualist and spoke frequently at Spiritualists' meetings. On August 19 he

John S. Dye and E. Mason Jr. Dye's Coin Encyclopedia: A Complete Illustrated History of the Coins of the World, [etc.] (Philadelphia: Bradley & Company. 1883).

Ibid., 3-5. 231

<sup>232</sup> Gospill's Philadelphia City Directory for 1881.

As discussed below, Wheeler had died in November 1883. The survival of only scattered issues of Dye's 233 Government Counterfeit Detector makes it impossible to pinpoint when Wheeler made these changes.

spoke at such a meeting in Lake Pleasant, Massachusetts. While it's not clear what exactly he said, he was accused of "attempting to introduce free love doctrine" into the meeting. <sup>234</sup> Evidently, differences over the free love doctrine had been splitting the Spiritualists for some time, just as such differences earlier had led to the collapse of the Liberal Leagues. Perhaps the controversy took a toll on Wheeler's health. He passed away in Boston on November 12, 1883. His obituary in the Boston Journal described Edward Wheeler of Philadelphia as a "prominent abolitionist and lecturer on Spiritualism and free thought for the past thirty years."235

Fortunately for the future of *Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector*, Wheeler had lined up what proved to be a very capable successor, Frederick A. Lester. In 1882, Wheeler's son, also named Edward S. Wheeler, married Mary Louise Lester, who hailed from Troy, New York. 236 It was probably the connection with the Wheelers that prompted Frederick A. Lester, Mary Louise's brother, and their mother to move to Philadelphia in 1883.

Frederick A. Lester was the publisher of *Due's Government Counterfeit Detector* from Wheeler's death in late 1883 until it ceased publication in June 1910. Therefore, it seems appropriate to record what has been discovered about Lester's life. He was born in Troy, New York in April 1851.<sup>237</sup> His father, Augustus Lester, was a prosperous cattle dealer; in 1870 Augustus owned real estate worth \$25,000 and personal property worth \$5,000.<sup>238</sup> Augustus died on December 9, 1870.<sup>239</sup> The 1880 U.S. census recorded Frederick A. Lester, whose occupation was listed as a lawyer, living in Troy with his mother, Louisa.<sup>240</sup>

Frederick first appeared in a Philadelphia directory in 1883, when he was living with his mother and his occupation was listed as a publisher.<sup>241</sup> Perhaps he already was working for Edward S. Wheeler at Dye's Detector. In any event, by 1884 Lester had taken over. He acted as executor for Wheeler's estate and placed an ad in Philadelphia newspapers asking those indebted to the estate to contact him at 1338 Chestnut Street, the address of *Dye's Detector*. Also, in 1884 Philadelphia directories began listing Lester as a publisher at 1338 Chestnut, which they continued to do through 1889.<sup>242</sup>

In early 1889, Frederick Lester was first listed as holding the copyright to *Dye's Government* Counterfeit Detector. 243 Perhaps prior to that date Joseph M. Dye continued to hold some claim to the copyright, having inherited a one-fourth interest in the detector from his father. Even into the early 1890s, both of Dye's sons were still working in some capacity for Dye's Detector. As discussed above, Joseph M. Dye had been involved in his father's publishing activities as early as 1866. A receipt for a subscription to Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector, dated April 28, 1893

<sup>&</sup>quot;Trouble in the Camp. An Attempt to Introduce Free Love Doctrine in the Spiritualists' Meeting," Patriot 234 (Harrisburg, PA), August 22, 1883, 2. The article reprinted a report from a Massachusetts newspaper, the Springfield Republican.

<sup>235</sup> "Edward S. Wheeler of Philadelphia," Boston Journal (Boston, MA), November 14, 1883, 1.

<sup>236</sup> "Married," Times (Troy, NY), August 31, 1882, 2.

Various U.S. and New York State censuses, beginning in 1860, agree that Lester was born in 1851. The 1900 237 U.S. census gives the more precise date of April 1851.

<sup>238</sup> U.S. Census for 1870. Troy, Rensselaer County, New York.

<sup>239</sup> Findagrave.com.

U.S. Census for 1880. Troy, Rensselaer County, New York. 240

Gospill's Philadelphia City Directory for 1883. 241

Gospill's Philadelphia City Directory, 1884-1889. 242

<sup>243</sup> The earliest issue the author has located that shows Lester holding the copyright is the April 1889 issue.

and signed by J.M. Dye, was offered by an online auction service in 2003.<sup>244</sup> Of course, this could have been Joseph M. Dye's son of the same name, who by 1893 was 25 years old. But the elder Joseph M. Dye was still living in 1893. He died in 1897 and is buried in Washington Cemetery in Washington, Pennsylvania with his mother and her second husband.<sup>245</sup>

After John S. Dye Jr. was recorded as a child in the 1850 census, the author has been unable to find any reference to him until 1881 and 1882, when he appeared in Philadelphia directories. In 1882 he is listed as a detective, so he may have begun working for *Dye's Detector*. On at least two occasions well after his father's death, a John S. Dye who was a government counterfeit detector was mentioned in newspapers. In 1884, a Philadelphia newspaper quoted his views on how to detect photographed counterfeit bank notes.<sup>246</sup> In 1891, an Iowa newspaper reported that John S. Dye, "publisher of the government counterfeit detector, the official organ of the United States treasury department," had visited the Iowa State Treasurer.<sup>247</sup> Frederick A. Lester, not John S. Dye Jr., was then the publisher. John S. Dye's sons (and perhaps his grandson) seem only to have been involved in selling subscriptions to Dye's Detector.

After he obtained the copyright, Lester did not change the contents of the detector significantly. In July 1890, however, he dropped the silly claim that the detector was published by order of the longdead Secretary Folger. However, he continued to claim it was an "Official Organ" and substituted a statement that it was published "under the supervision of the Secret Service by order of the then Secretary of the Treasury Department," presumably still referring to Folger but not by name. By then, numerous competing government counterfeit detectors were being published. In June 1892, one of those competitors had had enough. Dickerman's United States Treasury Counterfeit Detector, which called itself the "Standard Authority," castigated Dye's Detector as "that fake 'official organ." 248

Sometime in late 1896, Lester moved the offices of Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector to Washington, DC. He is not listed in the Washington, DC directory for 1896, but the 1897 directory listed him as a publisher at 135 Corcoran Building.<sup>249</sup> The December 1896 issue of the detector indicated the Detector's offices were at 135 Corcoran Building, which it noted was opposite the U.S. Treasury. Proximity to the Treasury Department probably was the rationale for the move. In the 1900 U.S census and again in the 1910 U.S census, Frederick A. Lester, publisher of a magazine, was recorded living in a boarding house at 1312 I Street, NW. Also, in 1899 he was listed as a member of the National Geographic Society.<sup>250</sup>

The author is uncertain why Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector ceased publication after June 1910. However, Frederick A. Lester died on April 4, 1911 and was buried in Oakwood Cemetery in his hometown of Troy, New York.<sup>251</sup> Perhaps by July 1910 his health no longer permitted him to carry on the publication. Without Lester's support, which had sustained the detector for twenty-six years, it probably could not survive.

<sup>244</sup> Icollector.com, Lot 1379, June 7, 2003.

Author's conversation with Erin Huff, an employee of the cemetery, on May 6, 2020. 245

<sup>&</sup>quot;Counterfeit Notes. New Processes by Which They Are Made and How to Detect Them," Times (Philadelphia, 246 PA). December 26, 1884, 3.

Quad-City Times (Davenport, IA), March 13, 1891, 3. 247

<sup>248</sup> Dickerman's United States Treasury Counterfeit Detector, The Standard Authority, June 1892, 3.

Boyd's Directory for the District of Columbia, 1897, 594. 249

Washington Academy of Sciences. Directory of the Washington Academy of Sciences and Affiliated Societies. 250 (Washington, D.C., 1899), 38.

<sup>251</sup> Author's conversation with Bernie Vogel, an employee of Oakwood Cemetery, Troy, NY on May 28, 2020.

## CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this book has been to document the history of John S. Dye's counterfeit detectors. That history has been rather long and complex because Dye published many detectors over a period of about thirty years and his last detector was carried on by others for another thirty years. His most innovative and important detector was Dye's Bank Note Plate Delineator, which established a new genre of detectors to identify a new generation of more sophisticated and dangerous counterfeits, the so-called spurious notes made from altered bank note plates. Unfortunately for Dye, he could not make a commercial success of his innovation. Nor did he live to see the sustained success of his last detector, and his wish that it be carried on by his wife and son was not fulfilled.

This book also provides as thorough an account of Dye's life as possible. He was a complex and controversial man. As a broker and a banker, early success was interrupted by legal and financial difficulties, partly but not wholly of his own making. The author's efforts to fill in what otherwise would be large blanks in his life story have revealed his complexity, including his lifelong support and advocacy of radical political, social, and religious ideas and movements, including a Workingman's Party, extreme conspiracy theories regarding the southern Slave Power, strange theories on the origins and history of man, Spiritualism, and perhaps even free love. He was also a detective, as emphasized in his death notice, including serving briefly as an operative of the U.S. Secret Service. For much of his life he was embroiled in controversy. Some of this no doubt simply came with the territory of publishing counterfeit detectors, and some no doubt because of his advocacy of unconventional ideas. In business he sometimes overextended himself and had trouble meeting his obligations, but in this he had plenty of company among nineteenth century businessmen. He had a lifelong habit of stretching the truth. In the 1870s he indulged his penchant for showmanship to the point of Barnumesque humbugging of his audiences. Accusations that he was a swindler, a rogue, a rascal, or a "bad egg" were made frequently, often by scurrilous newspapers but sometimes by credible sources. Whatever may have been true about his character, Dye's life unquestionably was eventful and colorful.

# APPENDIX: CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF BOOKS AND PERIODICALS BY JOHN S. DYE<sup>252</sup>

The Workingman's Advocate (Malta, OH), a weekly periodical Dye edited for a short time in 1846-1847.

Dye's Counterfeit Detector and Universal Bank Note Gazetteer; with Correct Rules by Which Spurious and Counterfeit Notes May Be Detected at a Glance, [etc.]. Cincinnati: John S. Dye, E. Morgan & Co., Stereotypers, 1850.

Dye's Bank Mirror and Illustrated Counterfeit Detector. Cincinnati and New York: John S. Dye, Publisher. A semi-monthly periodical, first issued in Cincinnati on February 15, 1851 and issued in New York as late as April 15, 1856.

Dye's Gold and Silver Coin Chart Manual. Cincinnati: Published by John S. Dye, Ben Franklin Printing House, Printers, 1851. Afterwards issued annually, first in Cincinnati and later in New York as a supplement to Dye's Bank Mirror and Dye's Wall Street Broker.

Dye's Book of Illustrations; an Accompaniment to His Illustrated Counterfeit Detector; for 1852. Cincinnati: Published by John S. Dye, 1852.

Dye's Book of Bank Note Plates, an Accompaniment to His Illustrated Bank Mirror. Cincinnati: published by John S. Dye, Banker and Broker, Ben Franklin Office Print, 1853.

Dye's Bank Bulletin. New York: John S. Dye, Publisher. A daily bank note list that was published from around October 1854 to around December 1855.

Dye's Bank Note Plate Delineator; A Spurious and Altered Bill Detector, Giving Printed Descriptions of the Genuine Notes of Every Denomination, of All the Banks Doing Business throughout the United States and British North America. Parts I and II. New York: Printed at the Offices of "Dye's Bank Mirror," 172 Broadway, NY, 1855.

Dye altered the titles of his periodicals over their lives. In the list below the titles are those used most 252frequently.

Dye's Bank Note Plate Delineator; A Spurious and Altered Bill Detector, Giving Printed Descriptions of the Genuine Notes of Every Denomination, of All the Banks Doing Business throughout the United States and British North America. Complete. New York: Printed at the Offices of "Dye's Bank Mirror," 172 Broadway, NY, 1855.

Dye's Wall Street Broker and North American Money Guide. New York: Published by John S. Dye. A monthly periodical published beginning in March or April 1857 and continuing into 1859.

The Adder's Den; or Secrets of the Great Conspiracy to Overthrow Liberty in America. Depravity of Slavery: Two Presidents Secretly Assassinated by Poison. Unsuccessful Attempts to Murder Three Others. The Evidence Conclusive, and the Facts Established. Together with the Dying Struggles of the Great Southern Rebellion. New York: Published by the Author, 1864.

History of the Plots and Crimes of the Conspiracy to Overthrow Liberty in America. New York: Published by the Author, No. 100 Broadway, 1866.

Lives and Eminent Public Services of Grant and Colfax. With Proceedings and Platforms of Republican and Democratic Conventions. Philadelphia: Published by the Author, Samuel Loag, Printer, 1868.

Humanity: Its Fountain and Stream. Illustrated by One Hundred Engravings, Giving One True and Correct Portrait, Taken from Nature, of Each Distinct People Now Known to the Civilized World: Among Which Are All the Reigning Sovereigns of Europe, President Grant, and Other Rulers. [etc.]. New York: Published by the Author, 646 Broadway and Printed by Little, Rennie & Co., 1870.

Dye's Government Counterfeit Detector. Philadelphia: Established by John S. Dye. A monthly periodical, first published in May 1877 and last published in June 1910.

The Government Blue Book. A Complete History of the Lives of All the Great Counterfeiters, Criminal Engravers, and Plate Printers. Philadelphia: Published by John S. Dye, 1882.

Dye's Coin Encyclopedia: A Complete Illustrated History of the Coins of the World, [etc.]. Philadelphia: Bradley & Company. 1883. Completed after Dye's death by numismatists Edward Maris and Ebenezer Locke Mason Jr.

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Chicago Tribune

Cleveland Leader

Cleveland Plain Dealer

Cincinnati Enquirer

Cincinnati Gazette

Congregational Journal (Concord, NH)

Daily Albany Argus

Daily Evening Express (Lancaster, PA)

Evening Telegraph (Philadelphia, PA)

Fremont Journal (Fremont, OH)

Gallipolis Journal (Gallipolis, OH)

*Greenville Enterprise* (Greenville, SC)

Intelligencer Journal (Lancaster, PA)

Hunt's Merchants' Magazine and Commercial

Review (New York, NY)

Lafayette Daily Journal (Lafayette, IN)

Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette

Louisville Daily Courier

 ${\it Meigs \ County \ Telegraph \ (Meigs, OH)}$ 

Memphis Daily Eagle and Enquirer

Mirror and Farmer (Manchester, NH)

New York Daily Tribune

New York Evening Post

New York Herald

Newark Daily Advertiser (Newark, NJ)

*Organ of the Temperance Reform* (Cincinnati, OH)

Ottawa Free Trader (Ottawa, IL)

Paddock's Bank Mirror (Cincinnati, OH and New

York, NY)

Patriot (Harrisburg, PA)

Philadelphia Inquirer

Phenological Journal and Life Illustrated (New

York, NY)

Pittsburgh Daily Post

Pittsburgh Gazette

Quad-City Times (Davenport, IA)

Times (Philadelphia, PA)

Times (Troy, NY)

True American (Steubenville, OH)

Wall Street Journal and Real Estate Gazette

Washington Review and Examiner (Washington,

PA)

Weekly Courier Journal (Louisville, KY)

Weekly Miners Journal (Pottsville, PA)

Wheeling Daily Intelligencer

Wheeling Register

Wyoming Democrat (Tunkhannock, PA)

## BUSINESS DIRECTORIES

Boyd's Directory for the District of Columbia, 1896-1911 Gospill's Philadelphia City Directory, 1867-1889 Trow's New York Directory, 1854-1870 Williams' Cincinnati Directory, 1849-1870

All exhibits not credited are images of items from the author's collection.

This book documents the history of John S. Dye's counterfeit detectors, a task made difficult by the ephemeral nature of such publications. Because new counterfeits and new genuine bank notes were constantly being circulated, counterfeit detectors quickly became outdated and were discarded, leaving very few surviving copies. This book fills in the gaps, largely through advertisements and articles in digital databases of contemporary newspapers. Dye first published a counterfeit detector in Cincinnati in 1850. Over the rest of his life, at various times and in various places, he published at least four other counterfeit detectors, a bank note reporter, and a book on notorious counterfeiters. After Dye's death in 1881, others completed a coin encyclopedia be had nearly completed and continued to publish a counterfeit detector bearing his name until 1910.

The book also tells the story of Dye's colorful life. There was much more to John S. Dye than his counterfeit detectors. As was often the case for publishers of counterfeit detectors, he was a dealer in bank notes and a banker. But that was far from all. Throughout his life he supported and advocated radical political, social, and religious ideas and movements, including a Workingman's Party, extreme conspiracy theories regarding multiple antebellum assassinations of U.S. Presidents by southern, slaveholding politicians, Spiritualism, and perhaps even free love. The book confirms that in the 1860s and 1870s he assumed the names John Smith Dye and Deacon Dye and published several books to support Republican presidential candidates and to espouse strange theories on the origins and history of man. Beginning with some celebrated lectures on counterfeiting in 1855, Dye was a popular lecturer and a showman on a variety of subjects, and some of his performances in the 1870s indulged his penchant for showmanship to the point of Barnumesque humbugging of his audiences. For a brief period (1869-1870), Dye drew on his knowledge of counterfeiting to serve as an operative of the U.S. Secret Service.

